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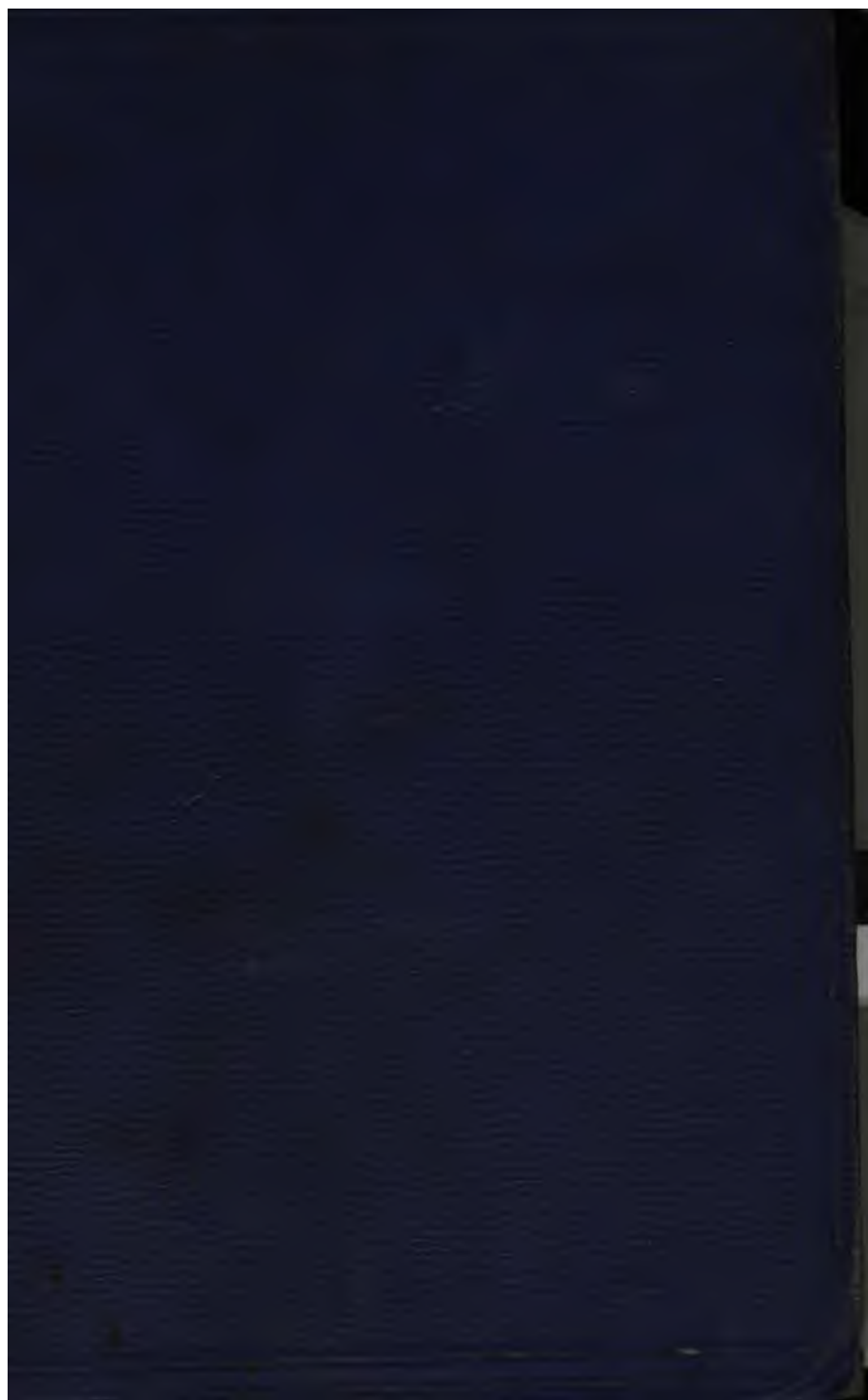
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**THE**  
**HILLYARS AND THE BURTONS:**

**A STORY OF TWO FAMILIES.**

**VOL. III.**



THE  
HILLYARS AND THE BURTONS:

*A STORY OF TWO FAMILIES.*

BY HENRY KINGSLEY,  
AUTHOR OF "AUSTIN ELLIOT," "RAVENSHOE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# THE HILLYARS AND THE BURTONS:

A STORY OF TWO FAMILIES.

## CHAPTER I.

TREVITTICK'S LATENT MADNESS BEGINS TO APPEAR.

THE fierce summer was blazing over head; the forests were parched and crisp; the plains were yellow and dry; and the rivers at their lowest, some barely whispering, others absolutely silent, as we passed away to the southward, towards our new home, and our strange new fortunes.

To the west and north of the town, the din grey grass wolds rolled off in melancholy waves towards the great interior; but to the south, on our track, the vast wood-clad mountains, dimly visible in the south-west, had thrown out a spur, which carried the dark forest with it down to the sea, and ended not ten miles from the town in the two noble promontories, Cape Horner

and Cape Huskisson. And so we had barely got clear of the enclosures when we found ourselves out of sight of the melancholy plains, travelling along a dusty winding track, fringed on each side with bracken fern, through a majestic open forest of lofty trees.

"I like this better than the plains," said Erne to me. "And yet I believe that I am going to live in the most dreary part of all the plains. The secretary says that they have to send five miles for firewood."

"Then you have decided what to do, sir?"

"Yes, I was going to tell you as we started, but your natural anxiety about getting on horseback for the first time rendered you rather a bad listener. How do you feel now?"

"Comfortable enough for you to go on; time is getting short."

"Well, I am going to one of the stations belonging to Mr. Charles Morton for three years, to learn the squatting trade. The Secretary wanted me very much; but I took Morton's offer, because this particular station of his lies more in a particular direction than any one of the brother-in-law's; and the Secretary said one station was as good as another, though he was a little offended."

"I suppose it is nearer to us."

"It is *only* sixty miles; but it is nearer than any other."

"What did *she* say this morning?"

"The old word, 'never,' Jim. She used the old argument about Joe's deformity, the impossibility of his marrying, and the necessity of some one devoting herself to him. And I said, 'Suppose that obstacle could be removed,' and she said there was a greater one still. She would never consent to drag me down to her level—that I was made for another sphere of life; and, when I impatiently interrupted her, she said, 'Mr. Hillyar would Mr. Oxton or Mrs. Morton receive me? And don't you know that you would be cut off from the best society here by marrying me, and have nothing left but the billiard-rooms?' And I hesitated one instant, and she broke out into a laugh at me. And she let me kiss her hand, and then we separated; and that is the end of all, Jim."

"Not for ever," I said. "If time or chance could remove those two obstacles——."

"I am faithful for ever," said Erne, in a low voice, "but I am losing hope. If I did not know she loved me, I could bear it better——."

I knew what was coming, from experience—a furious tirade against ranks and proprieties; but he was interrupted, for a horse came brushing rapidly along through the short fern, and rattling amongst the fallen bark, which lay about like vast sticks of cinnamon, and up



came the Hon. Charles Morton at a slinging trot, on a big chestnut, with a blazed face, and four white stockings; a "Romeo." His shining butcher's boots fitted like a glove, or like Custance's; his spurs were fresh from the plate-brush; his fawn-coloured breeches fitted to perfection; his shirt was as white as the Secretary's, and his light drab riding coat (he wore no waistcoat) was met by a bright blue scarf, with a diamond pin, his Indian pith helmet was wound round with a white veil; his whiskers and moustache were carefully trimmed; and altogether he was one of the most perfect dandies ever seen. This was Charles Morton of the towns; Charles Morton of the bush—the pioneer—was a very different object.

"Hallo, Hillyar, my boy. Well, blacksmith, how are you to-day? Confoundedly hot in these forests, is it not? Hillyar and I shall be out on the breezy plains in an hour; you will have forest for sixty miles or thereabouts."

I touched my hat for the information.

"You'll soon leave off doing that," he said, looking at me, laughing. And I thought if I never touched my hat to a less gallant-looking gentleman I shouldn't care.

"I am sorry to advise you to come up country so soon," said Mr. Morton to Erne. "But, as my principal overseer in those parts is going back, it will be a great

opportunity for you. He will introduce you to station after station on the road. He is not a gentleman by birth, but he is always received as one. I wish I could introduce you in those parts myself; but, considering your close connexion with the Secretary, he will do as well. Clayton will prove your identity."

When I heard the name "Clayton," I gave a violent start, and cried out, "Good gracious," which made my horse move forward a little faster, and which, consequently, nearly laid me on my back in the road. I lost both my stirrups, and hauled myself upright again by the reins. But my horse didn't care a bit. He only thought I was drunk. He was an aged stockhorse, which I had bought very cheap, as being a secure animal to begin with. He had been many years on the road, and had carried many stock-riders out of Palmerston, but never, hitherto, a sober one. He had been very much surprised at my not setting off full gallop for the first mile or two, yelling like a Bedlamite; and had shown that he expected that to happen on two or three occasions, to my infinite horror. He had long since come to the conclusion that I was too far gone in liquor to gallop; and, after my last reel, he concluded that I should soon fall off, and go to sleep in the road for an hour or two, after the manner of stockmen returning from town; in which case he would have a

quiet graze until I got sober. He was so fully persuaded of this, that I had (with infinite caution, as though I was letting off a large and dangerous firework) to give him, now and then, a gentle reminder with the spur to make him keep up with the others.

"Hallo! blacksmith!" said Mr. Morton. "We must teach you to ride better than that before we have done with you. But, Hillyar, you will find Clayton a very good, honest fellow. His wife is a woman of low origin, but well-behaved, who sings ballads if you care about that; there are no children, which, perhaps, you will be glad of. You will, however, find some books there. I am sorry to put you in a house where there is no society of your own rank; but it was your choice, remember. As soon as you feel able to undertake the thing, I will put you in charge of one of the other stations thereabout, and then you will have a table and cellar of your own. It is time to say good-bye to your friend now; here is Wattle Creek, and we take the road to the right; I will ride on; you will soon pick me up. Good-bye, blacksmith. God speed you heartily, my boy."

So, in his delicacy, he rode on, and left Erne and me alone together. There were many last words; and then the last of all—

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Jim. Keep her in mind of me. Good-bye."

And he rode slowly away, and I saw him passing on from sunlight to shade, from shade to sunlight again, through an aisle in the dim forest cathedral, whose pillars were trunks of the box-trees, and whose roof was their whispering foliage. Further and further yet, until he was lost among the thickening stems and denser boskage of some rising ground beyond. And then I sat upon my grazing horse, alone in this strange forest, foolishly wondering if I should see him, or any one I had ever known, again ; for all the past seemed more like reality than the present.

But I have noticed as a curious fact that, town-bred blacksmith boys, however affectionate, are not given to sentiment ; and, the moment Erne was out of sight, I began to make such a series of remarkable discoveries, that Erne, and the awful fact of his going to live in the house with Mrs. Clayton, sometime Avery, *née* Martin, went clean out of my mind. I gave myself up to the wild delight of being for the first time in a new and strange land.

Conceive my awe and delight at finding that the whole place was swarming with parrots. Hundreds of little green ones, with short tails, who were amazingly industrious and busy, and who talked cheerily to one another all the time ; others still more beautiful, with long tails (shell parrots, we call them, but now so popular in London as Zebra parakeets), who, crowded

in long rows, kissed one another, and wheetled idiotically; larger and more glorious ones yet—green, orange, scarlet, and blue (mountain blues)—who came driving swiftly through the forest in flocks, whistling and screaming; and, lastly, gentle lories, more beautiful in colour than any, who sat on the *Banksias* like a crop of crimson and purple flowers.

Then I made another discovery. I crossed the creek, and, blundering up the other bank, struck my spurs deep into the old horse's sides, and away he went full gallop, and I did not fall off. As soon as I recovered my presence of mind, by using certain directions given me by Erne and others, I made the wonderful discovery that I could stick on, and that I rather liked it. I was in a colonial-made saddle, with great pads in front of the knee, and I found that by keeping my toes slightly in, and raising my heels, I could sit as easily as in a rocking-chair. I assisted myself with the pom—our space is limited—but I was most perfectly at home after a mile, and found it the most delightful thing I had ever experienced, to go charging on ten miles an hour through a primæval forest towards unknown surprises and unknown dangers.

Whether the old horse thought that my intoxication had, like some recorded cases of hydrophobia, broken out after a long period of incubation; or whether he

thought I was the victim of an acute attack of skyblues (as he would have called the malady known to the faculty as delirium tremens), I am unable to say; but he went like the wind.

The road turned and wound about very much among the tree stems, but the old horse took care of me. I was prepared for any adventure or surprise, from a lion downwards, when I was startled by the shrill cry of familiar voices, and pulling up, found myself in the bosom of my family.

There were the dear old Chelsea group, a little older, sitting by themselves in this strange forest, just as they used to sit in old times in the great old room at home—my father and mother on a box side by side, Emma and Martha on the ground, with the children grouped round them, and Joe leaning against a tree, musing, just as he used to lean against the mantel-piece in old times.

“And poor Reuben,” I thought, “where was he?” But I said nothing. I asked my father how he found himself, and my father replied, “Bustin’;” and really the dear old fellow did look most remarkably radiant, as did the others, save Joe and Emma.

“We’ve been a having such a game a coming along, old man,” said my father. “We seen a alligator as hooked it up a tree; didn’t us, Fred?”

"And Harry, he's a drawed it in his book beautiful," said my mother complacently. "And now he's a drawing his own Jim a horseback, full gallop, as we see you a coming along just now. And Frank has been talking beautiful, and—"

I had dismounted, and Tom Williams had kindly taken my horse for me, and I was looking over my mother's shoulder at Harry's drawing of the great Monitor lizard and my humble self, rather uncertain, I confess, which was the lizard and which was me; but my mother had succeeded in getting my head against hers, and I asked in a whisper, "How are they?"

"Joe's terrible low," said my mother; "lower than ever I saw him. But Emma's keeping up noble. Did he send her any message?"

"No. How could he? He has got his final answer."

"I wish he had sent some message or other to her," said my mother; "for her heart's a breaking for him, and a few words would have been so precious. Couldn't you, eh, Jim?—didn't he say anything?"

I did not wait for my dear mother to propose point blank that we should coin a message together, but I went over and sat beside Emma, and took Fred on my lap.

"He is gone," I said in a low voice.

There was only a catch in her breath. She made no answer.

"Shall I tell you his last words?"

The poor girl only nodded her head.

"He said, 'Good-bye, Jim. Don't let her forget me.' And no more I will."

There was the slightest possible suspicion of scorn in the look she gave me as she said, "Is that very likely?"

Perhaps I was nettled; perhaps it was only owing to my clumsy eagerness about the matter which lay nearest to my heart. I cannot decide which it was; but I said,

"Would you not recall him now if you could?"

She did not answer in words, but she turned and looked at me; and, when she had caught my eye, she carried it with hers, until they rested on the figure of poor Joe, who had sat down on a log, with his great head buried in his hands. I understood her, and said no more, but quietly drew her to me and kissed her.

"If those two obstacles could be removed," I found myself saying a dozen times that day, and for many days.

We were travelling with a caravan of bullock drays, seven in number, each drawn by eight bullocks, all the property of our friend the Hon. Mr. Dawson,




which were returning empty to one of his many stations, Karra Karra, after taking to Palmerston a trifle of fourteen tons of fine merino wool, to swell his gigantic wealth. It was a very pleasant, lazy way of travelling, and I think that, when the long 270 miles of it came to an end, there was not one of us who did not wish that we could have gone a few miles further.

If the road was smooth, you could sit on the dray. If it was rough, you could walk, and walk faster than the dray went ; so much faster that some of us would walk forward along the track, which still wandered through dense and magnificent forest, as much as a mile or two, into the unknown land before us ; and, forewarned of snakes, gather such flowers as we could find, which at this time of year were not many. We had very few adventures. Sometimes we would meet a solitary horseman ; sometimes a flock of two or three thousand sheep going to market, whose three shepherds rode on horseback, and whose dogs, beautiful Scotch sheep-dogs, alert and watchful, but gasping with thirst, would find a moment to come to Fred or Harry and rub themselves against them complacently, and tell them how hot, hot, hot, it was. Sometimes again would come a great drove of fat cattle, guided by three or four wild-looking stockmen, in breeches and boots, which in this hot

weather were the principal part of their clothing, for they had nothing else but shirts without any buttons, and hats generally without any ribbons. These men were accompanied by horrid great dogs, who cut Fred and Harry dead ; but in spite of their incivility, their masters were very good-humoured and kind, keeping their cattle away from us with their terrible great stock-whips. The head stockman would always stay behind and talk to us—sometimes for a long while—generally asking us questions about England—questions which seemed almost trivial to us. I remember that one wild handsome fellow, who told Emma in pure chivalrous admiration, that looking at her was as good as gathering cowslips ; was very anxious, when he heard we were from Chelsea, to find out if we had ever met his mother, whose name was Brown, and who lived at Putney. He was afraid something was wrong with the old lady, he said, for he hadn't heard from her this ten years, and then she was seventy-five. He would go home some of these days, he added, and knock the old girl up.

After a few of these expeditions, ahead of the drays, we began to take Trevittick the sulky with us. For Trevittick, thirsting madly after knowledge, in the manner of his blue-haired fellow-Phœnicians, had spent more than he could very well afford in buying a book on the colonial flora. He now began to identify the



flowers as fast as we got them ; and, as the whole of us went at the novel amusement with a will, and talked immensely about it afterwards, we attracted poor Joe's attention, and, to my great delight, he began to join us, and to enter somewhat into the pleasure with us.

The forest continued nearly level ; the only irregularities were the banks of the creeks which we crossed at intervals of about ten miles—chains of still ponds walled by dark shrubs, shut in on all sides by the hot forest, so that no breath of air troubled their gleaming surface. But, when a hundred miles were gone, the land began to rise and roll into sharp ascents and descents ; and one forenoon we came to a steep and dangerous hill. And, while we were going cautiously down through the thick hanging trees, we heard the voice of a great river rushing through the wood below us. As we struggled through it, with the cattle belly deep in the turbid green water, we had a glimpse right and left, of a glorious glen, high piled with grey rocks, with trees hanging in every cranny and crag, and solemn pines which shot their slender shafts aloft, in confused interlacing groups, beautiful beyond expression. Only for a minute did we see this divine glen ; instantly after, we were struggling up the opposite cliff, in the darksome forest once more.

“Why,” I asked one of the bullock drivers, who

volunteered that evening to show me a place to bathe, "why is the water so ghastly cold? I can scarcely swim."

"Snow, mate, snow. This water was brought down from Mount Hampden by yesterday's sun."

The next morning the scene changed strangely, and Trevittick walked like one in a dream. As we went up a hill we saw the light between the tree stems at the top, and the wind began to come more freshly to our cheeks. When we reached the summit the forest had come to an end, and we were looking over into Flinder's Land.

A glorious country indeed; sheets of high rolling down, and vast stretches of table-land, bounded by belts of forest, and cut into by deep glens everywhere—channels for the snow-water from the mountains. Two great lakes gleamed among dark woodlands at different elevations, and far to the left was a glimpse of distant sea. A fair, beautiful, smiling land, and yet one of the most awful the eye ever rested on: for there was one feature in it which absorbed all the others, and made waving wood, gleaming lake, and flashing torrent, but secondary objects for the eye to rest on—just as the ribbed cliffs of stone which form the nave of Winchester, make the chantries of Wykeham and Edyngton appear like children's toys.

For to the right, towering horrible and dark, rose, thousands of feet in the air, high above everything, a scarped rampart of dolomite, as level as a wall; of a lurid grey colour with deep brown shadows. It dominated the lower country so entirely that the snow mountains beyond were invisible for it, and nothing gave notice of their presence but a lighter gleam in the air, above the dark wall. It stretched away, this wall, into the furthest distance the eye could penetrate. It had bays in it, and sometimes horrid rents, which seemed to lead up into the heart of the mountains—rents steep and abrupt, ending soon and suddenly—glens bounded with steep lawns of gleaming green. Sometimes it bent its level outline down, and then from the lowest point of the dip streamed eternally a silver waterfall, which, snow-fed, waxed and waned as the sun rose or fell. But there hung the great rock wall, frowning over the lovely country below; which like Pitt's face at the last, reflected in some sort of way smiles of sunshine and frowns of cloud, yet bore the ghastly look of Austerlitz through it all.

So for twelve days this dark rampart haunted us, and led our eyes to it at all times, never allowing us to forget its presence. In the still cool night it was black, in the morning it was purple, at noon it was heavy pearly grey, and at sunset gleaming copper-

colour. Sometimes, when we were down in a deep glen, or crossing some rushing river, we could only catch a glimpse of the level wall cutting the bright blue sky ; sometimes, again, when we were aloft on a breezy down, the whole of the great rampart would be in sight at once, stretching north and south as far as the eye could reach ; but for twelve days it bent its horrid frown upon us, until we grew tired of it, and wished it would end.

At last it ended. Gradually, for three days, a peaked mountain grew upon our sight, until we reached it, and began passing over the smooth short turf which formed its glacia ; a mountain which 'rose out of the lower land in advance of, and separate from, the great wall which I have been describing ; a mountain which heaved a smooth sharp cone aloft out of the beautiful slate country through which we have been travelling, and whose apex pierced the heavens with one solitary needle-like crag. It was the last remnant of the walls of an old crater ; of a volcano which had been in action long after the great cliff, which we had watched so long, had been scorched and ruined into its present form. The men called the peak Nicnicabarlah ; and, when we had rounded the shoulder of it we saw that our journey's end was near ; for a beautiful fantastic mountain range hurled itself abruptly into the sea

across our path, and barred our further progress, and as soon as we sighted it the men called out at once, "There you are, mates; there is Cape Wilberforce!"

"Cape Trap," growled Trevittick. "I'm blowed if I ever see such a game as this here. There should be *something* or another hereabout.—Tom Williams, don't be a fool, shewing off with that horse. He aint your'n, and you can't ride him; so don't rattle his legs to bits."

Trevittick was always surly when he was excited, and, to lead away his temper from Tom, I began asking questions of the men.

"Where is the town of Romilly?"

"Down to the left, between the timber and the plain, alongside of the Erskine river; the little river Brougham joins it just above the town. The Brougham rises in the mountains, and comes down through Barker's Gap. This is Barker's Gap we are passing now, the valley between Nicnicabarlah and the Cape Wilberforce mountain. There was a great fight with bushrangers hereabouts a year or two back, when young Inspector Hillyar finished three on 'em single-handed. He was a sulky, ill-conditioned beast, but a good-plucked 'un. He married Miss Neville; he used to come courting after her to Barker's. That's Barker's down yonder."

He pointed to a cluster of grey roofs in a break in the forest down below, and soon after our whole caravan began to descend one of the steep, rocky gullies which led from the shoulder of the volcano towards the sea; and very shortly we came into beautiful open forest-country, with a light sandy soil, the grass thin, but not wanting in abundance, and the ground intersected by innumerable dry water-courses.

There was a new mountain just in this place which attracted our notice—a little mountain, but wonderfully abrupt and picturesque, with high castellated crags. It was such a very lovely little mountain that Trevittick, Tom Williams, Joe, and I started off to go a little way up it.

A beautiful little mountain; tumbled boulders round the base, and steep escarpments of grey stone above, feathered with those trees which the colonists call cherries, but which we will in future call cypresses, for the sake of English readers.\* Trevittick got on the hill first, and, having taken up a bit of rock, said, "Well, I'm blowed," and seemed inclined to hurl it at Tom Williams, who was helping Joe to hunt a grasshopper about four inches long. To save an ex-

\* *Exocarpus cupressiformis*.



plosion I went up to him, and he unburdened his heart to me.

"Why," he said, "*it's granite.*"

I said I was very glad to hear it; but he turned on me so sharply that I was almost afraid I had made a mistake, and that I ought to have said that I had dreaded as much from the first. But after a somewhat contemptuous glance at me he went on—

"Yes, it's granite, or the substitute for it used in these 'ere parts. But it ain't felspathic-looking enough to suit *my* stomach, and so I don't deceive you nor no other man. Tom Williams, why be you hunting locusses instead of noticing how the granite has boiled up over the clay slates? Perhaps you'd like to see a plague of 'em; though, for that matter, nine out of the ten plagues all at once wouldn't astonish the cheek out of a Cockney, and the effect of the plague of darkness would be only temporary, and even that wouldn't only make them talk the faster."

Trevittick's ill-humour showed me that he was excited, although I did not in the least know why, or really care. I am afraid that at times I thought Trevittick, with all his knowledge, little better than a queer-tempered oddity. Perhaps what confirmed me in this belief, just at this time, was his way of ex-

pounding the Scriptures, which he did every Sunday morning, as I honestly confess, to my extreme annoyance. The moment that man got on the subject of religion, all his shrewdness and his cleverness seemed to desert him, and he would pour forth, for a whole hour, in a sing-song voice, a mass of ill-considered platitudes on the most solemn subjects; in the which every sentence, almost every word, was twisted round to meet the half-dozen dogmas which formed his creed. After his exposition of the fifty-second chapter of Isaiah, Joe and I declined further attendance.

A pleasant road, winding for miles among gently inclined forest gullies, led us to our new home; and, while the sun was still alive in the topmost branches of the majestic trees, we came upon the inn where we were to stay for the present. There were this one inn and a few other huts and inclosed paddocks scattered in the half-cleared forest around; but the sounds of nature, gentle and subdued as they were upon this quiet evening, far overpowered the faint noises of human occupancy. When the drays had gone on and left us, and the cracking of the last whip had died away in the wood, and the last dog had done barking from some little shanty far among the trees; then the air was filled with the whistling of birds, and the gentle rush of the evening breeze

among the topmost bough ; for the little river Brougham, which falls into the larger Erskine here, had ceased to babble in the drought, and was sleeping till the summer should end.

## CHAPTER II.

## CHANGES IN THE ROMILLY HOME.

VERY quiet, was Romilly in those old days; so old, yet in reality so recent. Ah me, what a turn my world has taken since I stood in the dusty road that evening, with Emma leaning on my arm and saying—

“What a happy place, Jim. What a peaceful place. See there, there is the burial-ground through the trees. I would sooner be buried there than at Chelsea—but—it don’t much matter where, does it? What was it Joe was reading to us out of the new book? Something—and there came

“And hands so often clasped with mine  
Should toss with tangle and with shells.”

I cannot remember any more, but it was about hearing the feet of those who loved you pass over your grave.”

My father and mother were two people who carried home about with them. These two people, sitting

together, would have made it home, even on an iceberg. Their inner life was so perfectly, placidly good; the flame of their lives burnt so clearly and so steadily that its soft light was reflected on the faces of all those who came within its influence; and such virtues as there were among those who were familiar with them, were brought into strong relief, while their vices retired into deep shadow. In a few words, they were good people, and, like all good people, to some extent made others good. Not only did we of the family fall into our quiet grooves at once, but this township of Romilly began to rally round my father and mother before we had been established a week. Began to call at all hours and waste our time, to borrow and lend pots and kettles; to give, to ask, but seldom or never to follow, advice; to go on, in fact, much the same as the Chelsea people had done on the other side of the water. After the first week of the establishment of our new shop, the men came and leant in at the window, and sat on the anvil, and toyed with the hammers, just in the old style; and, before my mother had been a week in the hastily-erected slab-house, the women began to come in, to flump down into a seat, and to tell her all about it. People in some ranks of life would be surprised at the facility with which the lower classes recognise thoroughly trustworthy and good

people. My father and mother not only submitted to these levees, but felt flattered by them. Every woman in the township had declined to know much of Mrs. Podder—who was known to have travelled for her sins—until they “met” her at Mrs. Burton’s, standing against the fire-place, with her bare arms folded on her bosom, smoking a short black pipe. Mrs. Burton had “took her up,” and that was enough. Mrs. Burton was so big, so gentle, and so good, that even the little weasel-faced savagely virtuous Mrs. Rance, with the vinegar temper, had nothing more to say. Again, my father made no difference between Tim Reilly and the best of them. Tim Reilly was free to come and go, and get a kind word at the forge; and the forge was neutral ground, and Tim was undeniably good company; and so Tim was spoken to at the forge, and if you spoke to him at the forge you could not cut him elsewhere. And so it came about that Tim found himself in respectable company again, and mended his ways (which wanted mending sadly), for very shame’s sake. And in time the stories about Tim’s “horse-planting” propensities got forgotten, and Tim rode his own horses only, and grew respectable.

So time began to run smoothly on once more, and a month began to slip by more rapidly than a week

used to do in more unquiet seasons. The week was spent in those happy alternations of labour and rest which are only known to the prosperous mechanic—alternate periods of labour, in which the intellect is half-deadened, because instinctive manual dexterity has, through long practice, rendered thought unnecessary—and of rest, when that intellect begins to unfold itself like some polypus, or sea anemone, and cast its greedy arms abroad in all directions to seize and tuck headlong into its unsatisfied stomach everything not actually inorganic. “O dura messorum ilia!” O delicious unsatisfied hunger! O blessed intellectual digestion! Did you ever read “Zimmerman on Solitude”\* and somebody’s (goodness knows who’s now) “History of the United States” through in one week? I did. And Tom Williams lay in the bed opposite, maddened and sulky with the few scraps I threw him about Saratoga and the *Macedonian*, Bunker’s Hill and the *Shannon* and *Chesapeake*.

Joe got horridly angry with Tom Williams and me on the subject of discursive reading. He (in the heat of the moment, I hope) said one day that he should like to see me wrecked on a desert island, with a year’s provisions, and nothing to read but Gibbon and Mosheim. That, he said, was the only thing which

\* It is a foolish old book, but there are many worse.

could happen to me that would make a man of me. After dexterously recalling a few compliments he had paid to Mosheim a week past that very day, in answer, I begged to be allowed his favourite copy of Rabelais. But he said that Rabelais would rise from his grave if he attempted any such profane act.

"Jim," he went on, "I am only chaffing ; you are a better scholar than I am. You know men, and I only know books. Now see how much in earnest I am ; I am come to you to ask you to decide a most important affair for me, and I bind myself in honour to abide by your decision. Tom Williams, old fellow, would you mind leaving Jim and me alone a little ? I know you won't be offended, Tom."

Tom departed, smiling, and then I said, "Martha my love, perhaps you had better go and help Emma ;" but Joe rose in his stately way, and, having taken her hand, kissed it, and led her to her seat again. The blacksmith's hunchbacked son had gradually refined and developed himself into a very good imitation of a high-bred gentleman ; and his courtesy somehow reflected itself on the pretty ex-maid-of-all-work, for she merely smiled a pleasant natural smile on him, and sat down again. What could a duchess have done more ? But then courtesy comes so naturally to a woman.



"I cannot go on with the business in hand, my dear sister," continued Joe, "unless you stay here to protect me. You know my brother's temper; unless I had your sweet face between me and his anger, I should not dare to announce a resolution I have taken."

"Pray," I said, "keep alive the great family fiction—that, because I splutter and make a little noise when I am vexed, therefore have a worse temper than others; pray, don't let that fiction die. I should be sorry if it did, for I reap great advantage from it; I always get my own way—if, indeed, that is any advantage. However, go on, Joe; if your resolution was not an infinitely foolish one, we should not have had all these words of preparation."

"Why," said Joe, "that is hardly the state of the case. In the first place, you are not going to have your own way this time, because I am going to have mine; and, my will being stronger than yours, you will have the goodness to go to the wall with as little noise as possible. In the next place, my resolution is not an infinitely foolish one, but an infinitely wise one. The only question about it is, Shall I be able to argue your fool's head into a sufficient state of clearness to see the wisdom of it?"

Whenever Joe and I came to what I vulgarly called

"hammer and tongs," I always yielded. I yielded now with perfect good humour, and laughed; though Joe was really ruffled for a minute.

"The fact of the matter is," he said, "that I have an offer of a place as second master in the Government school in Palmerston; and I have accepted it. In two years I shall be inspector."\*

I was really delighted at the news. I had seen a long time that Joe had been getting very discontented and impatient in consequence of the commonplace life which we were forced to lead. He was "chafing under inaction" (a phrase which expresses nothing save in its second intention, but is good enough, nevertheless). I was pleased with his news, but I was very much puzzled at the hesitation with which he communicated it.

I said, "Joe, I am sincerely glad to hear what you tell me. We shall miss you, my dear old fellow, but you will never be happy here. There is no doubt that if you once get the thin edge of the wedge in you will make a career for yourself. And, as far as I can see, you will have a good chance of getting the thin edge of the wedge in now. I don't like to tell you how glad I *am*, for fear you should think that

\* The educational arrangements in Cooksland are different from those in any of the other colonies.

I shall bear our separation too lightly; but I am very glad, and so I don't deceive you."

"So you should be, my faithful old brother. I should soon become a plague to you here. But have you no other remark to make about this resolution?"

"No. In *particular*, no. In a general way of speaking, I am glad of it. With regard to details now? Have you broke it to father?"

"No," said Joe, plumply; "*you* must do that."

I didn't see any great difficulty about it. I was beginning to say that he would require a regular fit-out of new clothes, and that we could manage that nicely now: when who, of all people in the world, should put in her oar but Martha.

"I suppose you have told Emma," she said.

"There!" said Joe. "A woman against the world. That is the very point I have been driving at, and have been afraid to broach."

"Do you want me to break it to her?" I asked.

"Break it to her! Why, my dear brother, it is all her doing from beginning to end. She gave me the first intimation that the offer would be made me, and then quietly told me that she had been in communication with Miss Burke about it for some months. She began on Miss Burke. I honestly confess that

*I* should never have thought of debauching the leader of the opposition before I put in my claim to ministers, but *she* did. She began on Miss Burke for the mere sake of inducing her to keep the Irish party quiet about my appointment; in the which phase of her proceedings Miss Burke's love for Lady Hillyar was her trump card, with which card she seems to have taken several tricks. Meanwhile, only three weeks ago, finding that Miss Burke was staying down here at the Barkers, she contrived an interview with her; and not only did she completely stop any opposition on the part of Mr. Ryan, but she actually persuaded, induced, bamboozled—I know not what word to use—Miss Burke into making the matter in some sort a party question. As I stand here, Miss Burke has made Mr. O'Ryan go to Mr. Oxton and say that, in case of my appointment to the inspectorship, not a word, on their sacred word of honour, should pass the lips of any son of Erin on the subject of the appointment of Billy Morton to the harbour-mastership. And that's your Emma."

I thought it was my Lesbia Burke, too, but I didn't say so. And, indeed, I was too much engaged in wondering at what Joe told me about Emma to think much about Lesbia Burke just now. I confess that I was a little amazed at this last exhibition of

cunning and courage in Emma. If I had not repelled her by a little coarseness of speech and a little roughness of temper, she would have confided in me more, and I should have noticed the sudden development of character which took place in her after our troubles—that sudden passage from girlhood into womanhood. But, indeed, it was only fault of manner on my part. And she loved me: she loved me better than all of them put together. Indeed she did.

“How do you want me to act in the matter, then?” I said.

“I want you to undertake father and mother. I want you not only to tell them of my appointment, but also to tell them this—that Emma has determined, under their approval, of course, to come to Palmerston, and keep house for me.”

I started as he said this. I was unprepared for it; and, as I did so, I felt a hand on my shoulder, and, turning round, I saw that Emma was standing behind me.

“Emma,” I said, “are you really going to leave us?”

She motioned me to come out with her, and we went out together and walked among the trees.

“You are not going to dissuade me from going, are you, my brother?” she said.

I was quite silent. She clasped her two hands

together over my arm, and hurriedly asked me if I was angry.

"There is never any confidence given to me until all the world knows the matter," I said; "then, when it is impossible to alter {matters, the affair is broken to me. Can you wonder that I am ruffled sometimes? I will not be angry now, but I will not allow that I have no reason."

"Only because I did not confide in you; not because you disapprove of our resolution?"

"Well, yes. I approve on the whole of your resolution; it is natural that you should be by his side for the present; though the time will soon come when he will not want you. You will be hardly ornamental enough to sit at a statesman's table, my poor, fat old thing."

Poor Emma was so glad to hear me speak in my natural tone that she threw her arms round my neck. I laughed and said,

"There is some one who don't think you a fat old thing, aint there? When will you go?"

"Next week."

"So soon? Does Joe say it is necessary?"

"No," she answered with some decision; "he does not say it is necessary. But I urged him to go, and pointed out the reason, and he quite approves of my resolution."

"Erne will think it very unkind. It will be so marked, to go only a day or two before his first visit."

"Let him think it unkind. I know which is the kindest line of action. I shall go, Jim. This is a matter in which I must decide for myself. Why did you start? Have you seen anything?"

We had wandered away along a track in the forest till we had nearly come to a dense clump of the low tree called lightwood (sufficiently like an English bay tree), through which the road passed. The night was gathering fast, and, when we were within fifty yards of the dark place, my cousin Samuel emerged from the gloom and came towards us.

I walked straight on, with Emma on my arm, intending to pass him without speaking. I had never spoken to him in Palmerston, and she had never seen him there; so this was her first meeting with him since that dreadful night when she had rescued Reuben from that den of thieves into which he had drawn him. I was made anxious and angry by his sudden appearance here in Romilly, and I very much wished to avoid having anything to do with him.

Emma, however, would not pass him without a kind word, and so she stopped as he stood aside to let us pass him, and said,

"It is a long while since we met, cousin. I hope you have been well since I saw you."

"I have been very well," he answered, with a false smile wreathing on his thin lips. "I am very much obliged to you for speaking to me, for I was anxious to see you, and ask you a question."

"I shall be glad to answer it," she replied. "I am your debtor, you know."

"You are pleased to say so. I will go on, with your leave. I am exceedingly anxious and unhappy about my boy Reuben."

"On what grounds?" said Emma. "He is well, and is doing very well. I heard from him last mail."

"He preserves a dead silence towards me. I never hear a word from him. I have no answer to my letters. What is the meaning of this?"

By this time his voice had risen to a shrill treble, and he was waving his arm up and down threateningly ; his pinched features, his long nose, and his high sloping eyebrows began to form an *ensemble* which looked uncommonly vicious. He went on—

"He has been tampered with, his affections have been alienated from me, and his mind has been poisoned against me by that scoundrel. How dares he? is he mad?"



I said that none of us had ever been so wicked as to stand between Reuben and his father.

"I am not talking of you, my lad," he said in a quieter voice. "You and yours have always been what is kind and good. I am speaking of a scoundrel, a wretch, without decency, without gratitude—a monstrous mass of utter selfishness. But let him take care! Let him take care!"

And so he walked swiftly away under the darkening shadows, with his hand raised menacing over his head, muttering, "Let him take care." And it came into my head that if I were the gentleman referred to I most certainly would take uncommon good care.

"It's Morton, the keeper, he is so wild against," I remarked. "I am glad that there is fourteen or fifteen thousand miles between them."

"It must be Morton," said Emma; "otherwise I might think it was Sir George. What a strange thing this is, his never coming near Stanlake! I wonder why?"

"I cannot think," I said, as we turned homewards, "that Reuben is right in not writing to his father. I cannot understand it; it is unlike Reuben."

"I do not understand it either," said Emma. "I will certainly mention it to him the next time I write. Poor old Reuben! how I should like to see him again! How

time goes on, don't it, eh? Jim, I want to walk further with you in the dark, just one more turn."

"Come," I said, cheerfully. "I could walk for ever in this delicious owl's-light, with you beside me."


I went on with her gently, whistling and waiting for her to begin. I was very anxious.

"I am going to ask half a dozen questions about Mr. Erne Hillyar," she said at last. "Is he ever likely to be rich?"

"I cannot see how. He gets some nominal salary where he is—two hundred a-year, I think; and, when he is out of his apprenticeship, I do not see how he is to start on his own account without capital. His share of the property would certainly be enough to make him rich here. But, as I tell you, he will die sooner than claim it."

"A strange crotchet. But look here. He would take it in an instant if a reconciliation were brought about between him and his brother. Why could not that be done? Think of it."

"What is the good? Erne here in Australia, and Sir George at Timbuctoo by this time, for aught we know! Nonsense. There are only two obstacles to prevent your accepting Erne, as you well know—the care of Joe, and your dread of lowering Erne. About the first obstacle I shall say nothing, but I certainly don't want Erne to be



raised away above our level once more, and so I tell you plainly."


We said no more, but went silently in. I kissed her when we came to the door. Those sweet sister-kisses were becoming precious now, for was she not going to Palmerston to keep house for Joe? and one might not see her again for so long—certainly not till after I was married. There was between us one deep source of disagreement. I had set my heart on her marrying Erne, and she would have none of it. But still she was very, very dear to me—dearer perhaps and more valued since that cause of disagreement had arisen between us than she had ever been before.

## CHAPTER III.

## FEEDS THE BOAR AT THE OLD FRANK ?

THE pleasant summer passed away, and Gerty found to her terror that the days when she dared creep out into the sun with Baby, and warm herself under the south wall, were become fewer; that the cruel English winter was settling down once more, and that she and her little one would have to pass it together in the great house alone.

At first, after George's departure people continued to call; but Gerty never returned their visits, and before the later nights of September began to grow warningly chill, it was understood that Sir George was abroad; and very soon afterwards Lady Tattle found out that Lady Hillyar was mad, my dear, and that Sir George had refused to let her go into an asylum, but had generously given up Stanlake to her and her keeper. That florid grey-headed man whom we saw driving with her in Croydon was her keeper. Such stories did they make about poor Gerty and Mr. Compton; which stories, combined



with Gerty's shyness, ended in her being left entirely alone before autumn was well begun.

Soon after Sir George's departure Mr. Compton heard from him on business, and a very quiet business-like letter he wrote. He might be a very long time absent, he said, and therefore wished these arrangements to be made. The most valuable of the bricabrac was to be moved from Grosvenor-place to Stanlake; Lady Hillyar would select what was to be brought away; and then the house was to be let furnished. The shooting on the Wiltshire and Somersetshire estates was to be let if possible. The shooting at Stanlake was not to be let, but Morton was to sell all the game that was not required for the house by Lady Hillyar. Mr. Compton would also take what game he liked. He wished the rabbits killed down: Farmer Stubble, at Whitespring, had been complaining. The repairs requested by Farmer Stubble were to be done at once, to the full extent demanded; and so on in other instances—yielding quietly, and to the full, points he had been fighting for for months. At last they came to Stanlake. Stanlake was to be kept up exactly in the usual style. Not a servant discharged. Such horses as Lady Hillyar did not require were to be turned out, but none sold, and none bought, except under her ladyship's directions. He had written to Drummond's, and Lady Hillyar's cheques could be honoured.

There was a revolution here (Paris), but how the dickens it came about, he, although on the spot, couldn't make out. There were no buttons here such as Lady Hillyar wished for ; but, when he got to Vienna, he might get some, and would write to her from that place and put her in possession of facts. She might, however, rely that, if money could get them, she should have them.

He did not write one word to Gerty. His old habits were coming back fast—among others, that of laziness. Boswell, enlarging on a hastily expressed opinion of Johnson's, tries to make out the ghastly doctrine that all men's evil habits return to them in later life. What Boswell says is, possibly, no matter—although he was not half such a fool as it has pleased my Lord Macaulay to make him out—yet there is a horrible spice of truth in this theory of his, which makes it noticeable. Whether Boswell was right or not in general, he would have been right in particular if he had spoken of Sir George Hillyar ; for, from the moment he cut the last little rope which bound him to his higher life, his old habits began flocking back to him like a crowd of black pigeons.

The buttons came from Vienna, and a letter. The letter was such a kind one that she went singing about the house for several days, and Mr. Compton, coming down to see her, was delighted and surprised at the change in her. After Sir George's departure, the poor

little woman had one of her periodical attacks of tears, which lasted so long that she got quite silly, and Mr. Compton and the housekeeper had been afraid of her going mad. But she had no return of tearfulness after the letter from Vienna, but set cheerfully to work to garrison her fortress against the winter.

She would have had a few trees cut down for firewood in the Australian manner, had not the steward pointed out to her ladyship the inutility and extravagance of such a proceeding. She therefore "went into" coals to an extent which paralysed the resources of the coal merchant, who waited on her, and with tears in his eyes begged her not to withdraw her order, but to give him time; that was all he asked for—time. The next thing she did was, by Baby's advice, to lay in a large stock of toys, and then, by her own, an immense number of cheap novels. And, when all this was done, she felt that she could face the winter pretty comfortably.

Stanlake was a great, solemn, grey-white modern house, with a broad flagged space all round, standing in the centre of the park, but apart from any trees: the nearest elm being a good hundred yards away, though the trees closed in at a little distance from the house, and hid the landscape. It was a very dreary place even in summer; in winter, still more solemn and desolate. When it had been filled with company there had been

noise and bustle enough perhaps, but, now that Gerty was left in solitary state, silence seemed to settle down and brood on it the whole day long. In the morning, when the men were washing the horses, there would be some pleasant sounds from the stable-yard; but, when they had done—except when a dog barked in the distant kennel or the rooks made a faint sound in the distant rookery—perfect stillness seemed to reign over everything.

Within, all was endless gallery opening into library, library into dining-room, dining-room into drawing-room, till the astonished visitor found that he had gone round the house and come back to the hall again. The drawing-rooms were pleasant and light, the library was dark and comfortable, the dining-room was staidly convivial: it was merely a common-place, well-furnished, grand house; but now, since Sir George's departure, since silence had settled down in it, it began to have such a ghastly air about it that the servants generally came into the rooms in pairs, and showed a great tendency to sit together over the fire in the steward's room and servant's hall at night, and not move for trifles.

And the ghost which frightened them all was no other than poor little Gerty. They never knew where they were going to find her. These old staid, grey-headed servants had always thought her ladyship very queer, but now she began to be to them what the Scotch call



uncanny. There were, as the housekeeper would have told you with pride (as if she had built the house), no less than three hundred feet of suite in the great rooms which ran round the house, and in this suite there were no less than sixteen fireplaces. When the first frost sent the leaves fluttering off the elms, and rattling off the horse chestnuts, Gerty had every one of these fires lit and carefully attended to all day. It was now that the servants, who had always been slightly afraid of her, began to steal about the rooms : for, among all the sixteen fireplaces, it was impossible to say at which a nervous middle aged footman would find her ladyship lying on her back on the hearth-rug, and talking unutterable nonsense, either to Baby, or, what was worse, in his unavoidable absence, to herself. The servants, being mostly old, got so many frights by trusting themselves in the great wilderness of furniture, and coming on Lady Hillyar in the very place where they would have betted all they had she wasn't, that it became the custom to plead indisposition in order to avoid going, and in some cases to resort to stimulants before going, into the strange ghostly region alone.

Sometimes they would hear her romping with Baby. Sometimes her voice would come from afar off, as she sat and sang at the piano. As far as they could gather, she was never low-spirited or dull. She read a great

deal, and used to dress herself very carefully ; but, as time went on, the old housekeeper began to fancy that she got a little vacant in her answers, and longed for spring to come again, and for her ladyship to get out on the downs.

She had only one visitor, **Mr. Compton** ; and he would come down sometimes for a night on business, at which time she would entertain him at dinner. She would talk about George and his whereabouts, and calculate on the period of his return, strange to say, with less eagerness as the time went on. Her present life, whatever its objections might be, was at all events peaceful ; and that was much, after that dreadful letter, the recollection of which came on her sometimes yet with a chill of horror. But she was gradually forgetting that ; nay, was going a very good way to work to forget a good deal more.

Baby was not condemned to entire seclusion with his mother. He had been ill once, and a doctor being brought in, ordered the child two hours' exercise every day. And so, every day, he was consigned to Reuben, who led him away on a little pony through all the secluded coverts where his duty lay, and, in his pleasant way, introduced him to all the wild wonders of the gamekeeper's world.

The child got very much attached to Reuben, as did most people ; and Gerty had such full confidence

in him, and the boy grew so rosy and hale under his care, and it was so pleasant to hear the boy's stories of his day's adventures at their little tea, that she gave Reuben every liberty about hours, and Reuben himself, being fond of the company of children, would very often keep the **child out** late.

The winter dragged on, and Gerty began to anticipate her release : when, on a wild March evening with a lurid sunset, the boy came home and told his mother that they had met the devil walking in a wood. That the devil had been glad to see Reuben, and wished (as Baby believed) for Reuben to give him (Baby) to him (the devil). That Reuben had been very much frightened at first, but after a time had coaxed the devil away, and talked to him in a dark place among the trees ; during which time he (Baby) had sat on the pony all alone, and let it eat grass. Upon this Gerty sat on him like a commissioner. To Question 250, "My gracious goodness, child, how near were you to him?" the Answer was "Ever so far. Reuben ran forward when he saw him, to prevent his catching hold of me." Q. 251, "Did you see his face?" A. "No. But I know it was the devil." Q. 252, "Why?" A. "Because he went on going to and fro, like he did in Job." Q. 253, "Had you no other reason for thinking it was the devil?" A. "Yes." Q. 254,

"What?" A. "Reuben said it was." Q. 255, "What did Reuben say besides, in the name of goodness?" A. "He said that, if I told you a word about it, the beadle would come down the chimney at twelve o'clock at night, and carry me off to apprentice me into the wooden-leg and glass-eye business." Q. 256, "How do you come to remember Reuben's nonsense so well, you little silly thing?" A. "Because he kept on saying it all the way home." Q. 257, "Why did you tell me if Reuben told you not?" A. "I don't know." Q. 258, "Do you want any more marmalade?" A. "Yes."

Lady Hillyar rang the bell, and asked if Reuben was gone. It seemed he was not, and it seemed, moreover, that he had distrusted his little friend's discretion, for, on being shown up, he was in a most perfect state of London assurance, ready for Gerty at all points. Before the conversation could begin, it was necessary that Baby should go to the nursery, and, as it appeared (after a somewhat lively debate, in which Gerty adduced the fate of the children who had called after—or as she expressed it, "joed"—the prophet Elisha, without the slightest effect) that he would not go there unless Reuben took him, Reuben had to take him accordingly. After a long absence he reappeared, and the conversation began.

"Well! if this don't bang wattle gum,"\* began Gerty, who was wild with curiosity, and forgot her manners accordingly, "I wish I may be buried in the bush in a sheet of bark. Why I feel all over centipedes and copper lizards. For you to go and see the devil with that ~~dear~~ child, and teach him not to let his mother know, and in Whitley Copse too, of all places, and you old enough to be his father. You ought to be——. You ought to get——. Why you ought to have your grog stopped——."

"My lady, indeed——"

"No, I don't mean that. You musn't be angry with me; I wasn't really in a pelter. You aint going to be cross with me, are you, Reuben? You did see the devil now, didn't you? That dear child would never deceive his own mother. Come, I am sure you did."

"I only *told* him it was the devil, my lady."

"Then who was it? It couldn't have been Black Joe, because we heard of his being hung, soon after we went into Cooksland, for putting a chest of drawers on an old woman to get her money out of her, though why he couldn't have taken it out of her pocket— He

\* This is a very low expression. If Mrs. Oxtan had been there she never would have dared to use it. In the bush, when a chemist's shop is not handy, the gum of the acacia is used instead of chalk mixture.

was very like the devil, my father used to say, though I don't believe he ever saw him—the devil I mean ; he saw Black Joe often enough, for he was assigned to him ; and I remember his getting fifty for sauce one shearing time—”

“It wasn't him, my lady,” said Reuben, arresting the torrent. “It was a young man of the name of Ned, that keeps a beer'us in Old Gal Street, Caledonia Road. That's about who it was, my lady. A terrible chap to swear and carry on in his drink, my lady, and I smelt him as I was coming through the copse, that he'd been at it ; and I says, I says, Dash it all, I says, there'll be high life below stairs with him in about two twists of a lamb's tail ; and I says to the kid—I ask pardon, the young 'un ; I ask pardon again, the young master—Stay here, I says, while I go and has it out with him ; for the ears of the young, I says, should never be defiled, nor their morality contaminated with none of your Greenwich Fair, New Cut, Romany patter. And so I goes to him, my lady.” Reuben, whose bark was now labouring heavily in the trough of a great sea of fiction, continued, “I goes to him, and —”

“I think you were perfectly right, my dear Reuben,” said Gerty. “I thank you for your discretion. My father had the greatest horror of the same thing. None of my sisters ever interchanged words with a hand in

their lives. And, indeed, I never should have done so ; only I was let run wild in consequence of mamma's being so busy getting my sisters off, and papa being always in town after that dreadful drop in tallow, which ultimately flew to his stomach at the Prince of Wales, and took him off like the snuff of a candle. For my part—"

Here Reuben, who, having got breathing-time, had rapidly carried on his fiction in his head, took it up again : not at the point where he had dropped it last, but at the point to which he had arrived when he found himself capable of going in for another innings. So *he* began. Which left Gerty in the position of the reader of the third volume of a novel, who has had no opportunity of reading the second.

"And, so my lady, his aunt said that, with regard to the five-pound note, what couldn't be cured must be endured, and with regard to the black and tan terrier bitch, what was done couldn't be helped, though she hoped it wouldn't happen again. And they had in the gallon, my lady, and then they tossed for a go of turps and a hayband—I ask your ladyship's pardon, that means a glass of gin and a cigar ; and that is all I know of the matter, I do assure you."

How the conversation would have come to an end, save by the sheer exhaustion of both parties, had not Baby

appeared in his nightshirt to look after Reuben, we cannot say. It concluded, however; and, however much nonsense Reuben may have talked, he certainly gained his object, that of mystifying Gerty, and making her forget the subject in hand. He wished her good night with a brazen front, and, having received a kind farewell, departed.

Now what had really happened was shortly this. That evening, as he had been leading the child's pony through a dense copse, Sir George Hillyar had stepped out from behind a holly, and beckoned to him.

Reuben was very much astonished, for he supposed Sir George to be at Florence, but he let go the pony and came forward at once. Sir George looked wild, and, as Reuben thought, dissipated; he caught Reuben's hand, and said,

"Ha! One single face left in all the world, and all the rest chattering ape-heads. How are you, my boy?"

Reuben was well, and very glad to see Sir George. "Lady Hillyar would have a pleasant surprise," he said, but looking at Sir George's appearance, very much doubted it.

"She must know nothing. Not a soul must know anything but yourself. What child is that?"

"Your own, sir."

"Poor little thing. Has he recognised me?"



"It would be impossible at that distance."

"Meet me to-morrow night after dark at this address. I have prowled all the afternoon to catch you, and I must be gone. Mind! not one word."

And so he had gone, leaving Reuben lost in wonder. However, his self-possession had prevented his betraying himself to Lady Hillyar. And, when he left her presence, he began to think of the address Sir George had given him; thinking probably that it would be at some West-end hotel. What was his astonishment to find that it was Lawrence Street, Chelsea—a strange place indeed in which to find a baronet.

He got there a little after dark. He found the house at once, of course, having known every house there from his boyhood. It was a largish old house with bow windows, which might have been respectable once, but which was now let out in floors and single rooms to poor people. Passing up the common staircase, into the close smell which there is in all that kind of houses—a smell which had been familiar to him all his youth, and yet which seemed so repugnant after a year in the sweet fresh airs of Stanlake—he went on to the second floor; and, before he had time to knock at the door of the front room, the door opened, and Sir George beckoned him in.

"You stare to find me here, boy, hey?"

"I thought you at Florence, sir. But I am heartily glad to see you."

"Why do you hesitate to call me 'father,' Reuben?"

"Indeed—well then, 'Father'—I hardly know. In spite of all the proofs you have given me of it from time to time—in spite of all your kindness—it seems strange. Hang it all, sir," continued he, with an air of petulance; "a man can't get used to everything all of a heap. And I aint got used to this yet. And, what is more, I must have my time *for* getting used to it. Now."

His true Londoner's hatred for anything approaching sentiment made him positively angry for a moment. But his good humour came back directly, and he asked Sir George if he had given offence.

"Offence! not the least. I could have expected no more. I will make you like me."

"I do so already," said Reuben. "More than you think for, perhaps; but I don't like talking about that sort of thing. I never knew a chap worth three halfpence who did."

"Well," said Sir George, "I don't know but what you are right. Boy, I'll prove I care for you by deeds, and we will talk no more on the subject. I have very little to ask you. You have kept me pretty well *au fait* with matters at Stanlake. Do you know what I have been doing abroad?"

"I do not, sir. Travelling?"

"And you might add gaming considerably, and you might add winning considerably. But I have been hard at work too. I have been hunting a wolf, Reuben."

"What wolf, sir?"

"Yes. An old grey wolf. I could never come up to him. He travelled fast, faster than I, who had to make inquiries, could follow him. But I tracked. Yes, by George, like an old inspector."

Sir George Hillyar had risen, and was standing with his back to the fire, biting his nails impatiently. Reuben sat in the gloom and watched him anxiously. His face was worn into deep lines, and his old scowl, which was so familiar to those who had known him in his worst times, was strong upon his face to-night.

"I tracked him," said he, speaking half absently to Reuben, "from here to Paris—to Geneva—to Turin—to Ajaccio. What did he want there, in the name of his master the devil? And then to Naples, and Malta, and at Malta I lost him, and he *must* have come back to England. Have you seen him?"

He said this suddenly and sharply. Reuben asked whom he meant?

"Why, Samuel Burton. Did I not tell you? Have you seen him?"

Reuben said, "No," but cunningly waited to hear

more. "What might make Sir George so anxious to find him?" he asked.

"Nought! A little conversation. A few words in private. Nothing more."

He said this so strangely that Reuben would not say what was on the tip of his tongue. To wit, that Samuel Burton was at that present moment in Australia, and that he had in his pocket at that moment a letter announcing his arrival there. Reuben thought that it might be wise to keep these two good people apart. He was confirmed in his resolution by all that he saw and heard that night.

Sir George kept him there talking for a long time. The conversation was all on Sir George's part, and consisted almost entirely of a long diatribe against Samuel Burton: his ingratitude, his falseness, his villanous, abominable ingratitude over again, until Reuben was prompted to ask suddenly, "whether he had been up to anything fresh." Sir George said no, and talked more cautiously.

He asked about Stanlake; about the home farm; about the game; about Lady Hillyar. Had she been alarmed at night? Had there been any attempts at burglary? there was a deal of property in the house. He knew for certain that the house had been robbed once, and that the thief had got in through the pantry

window. Morton should be told of this ; Reuben had better tell him. Reuben had better say that he had received a letter from Florence, and that Morton was to sleep in the house, and shoot any man who attempted to break in stone dead. It was only justifiable homicide ; the law would acquit him. Reuben had better say nothing about it ; he did not wish any one shot. He was a miserable and most unhappy beggar, and wished he was dead, and that Erne was dead, and that they were all dead, and quietly asleep in their graves. He was not afraid of death, he said, and wondered that he was fool enough to live on. If he could bring himself to believe in a future state, of any sort or kind, he would blow out his brains that night. But he couldn't, and annihilation was so horrible. He had not been used justly. He had had no chance. He appealed to Reuben. Reuben would not stand there and say that he had ever had a fair chance ; not such a chance as one gentleman would give another. The whole state of this world was horrible and abominable ; a man was predoomed to ruin from his cradle. The Ultrapredestinarians were right. He would publicly declare for them, and declare himself reprobate. He would not do it for nothing though ; if his doom had been sealed from the first, he would not go quietly to his punishment. No. That dog might be assured of his salvation,

but he should feel the horror of sudden death. He would get face to face with that dog, and inflict on him a few moments of ghastly terror.

And so on. If any man cares, let him follow out poor Sir George Hillyar's frantic, illogical line of thought. It would be very easy, but is it worth while?

Sir George had worked himself into a state nearly frantic, and Reuben was sincerely distressed. At last he ventured up to him, and, laying his hand on his arm, besought him earnestly to be quieter. It had a sudden effect; Sir George grew calmer, and his rage died away into low mutterings.

Presently he told Reuben that he must go. He cautioned him not to mention his having seen him to any living soul, and so dismissed him.

"I will go and look at the outside of the old place," said Reuben to himself as soon as he was in the street. "I am fond of it for their sakes. What a kind lot they were! I wonder what they are doing now. So it's all broke off between Emma and Mr. Erne; more the pity."

Thinking in this way, Reuben passed through the narrow passage by the dissenting chapel, and soon stood before the old deserted house. Brown's Row was mainly gone to bed. Only Mr. Pistol, who had got off with a twelvemonth, was standing with three or four

others under a lamp, and expressing his intention of slitting a certain worthy magistrate's throat from ear to ear. But, hearing a base groveller of a policeman coming round the corner, he swaggered off with a dignified silence in the direction of Church Street; and the Row was left in peace.

Reuben was glad of it, for he was (for him) in a sentimental mood, and felt very much inclined to stand and watch the old house, bathed in the light of the early spring moon. He leant in the shadow under the pent-house of the Burtons' forge, and watched the dear old place with something very like emotion—when all at once Sir George Hillyar came up, without seeing him, and disappeared round the back of the house.

Prompted both by curiosity and by reckless love of adventure, Reuben immediately followed him. When he got round the house, no one was there, and it was evident that Sir George had got into the yard by a broken place in the palings; and Reuben, looking in, saw him enter the old house by a back window which was left unclosed.

"Now, what is the meaning of this? and what on earth is he doing here?" thought Reuben, and immediately crouched down under the window. He heard Sir George on the stairs; and quickly, and with the

silence of a cat, he followed him in, and slipped off his shoes.

He found himself in the old familiar kitchen, and crouched down for fear of Sir George lighting a candle. He did not, however, but passed on, and began ascending the great staircase.

What made Reuben feel sure that he was going up to his old room—to the room which had been the scene of so much before? Reuben was puzzled to find a reason for such a strange proceeding; and yet he was absolutely certain that he was going there. So certain that he followed more rapidly than was quite prudent.

The moon flooded the house, through every available cranny, with a dull weird light; and Sir George was easily kept in sight. It was the more easy to do it, as there was a brisk wind abroad, which filled the house with rustling sound, and hushed the footsteps of the follower. He passed on, higher and higher, till he passed into Reuben's room, and disappeared. Reuben, waiting a few minutes, cautiously peeped in at the half-open door. His old bed stood there still; it was barely worth removing; but there were other evidences of Sir George having been there before. The bed was roughly covered with a blanket—bed enough for an old Australian; and there were other signs of habitation, in the midst of which sat Sir George at a broken old



table, with his revolver lying before him. Reuben gave one look at him, and then stole silently away, his retreat being covered by the innumerable mysterious noises of the deserted place.

## CHAPTER IV.

## JAMES BURTON'S STORY: THE CLAYTON MÉNAGE.

"At last," I cried out, as I saw Erne come slinging on through the forest towards me,—“Why, I thought I had lost you for ever.”

“Old boy, I am so glad to see you. I was determined to make you wait for letting Emma go away before my appointed visit. You see I have avenged myself on you by keeping you waiting some six months for a sight of my handsome mug. It was only your wedding which brought me over at last. And how are you all?”

We were all very well.

“You have seen Joe’s Report,” said Erne, “of course. Is it not masterly? I am so rejoiced; but no one ever doubted his abilities but himself. The conclusion pleased me; I heard the old fellow’s voice as I read it, and saw him emphatically rolling his head at every

period ; it is so exactly like Joe. ‘ Our tender mercies to these people will be found to be but cruel, if we do but raise them out of a sea of physical misery which was overwhelming them in the old world, to plunge them into a moral and intellectual one in this. In examining the condition of the class of boy on which you ordered me to report, I found an insolent ignorance, a sullen impatience of control, which gave me the deepest concern, and which has settled for ever in my own mind the question of compulsory education. Unarmed with such powers as I should derive from the prestige which is naturally the right of an officer appointed by Government, and by a law rendering education compulsory ; I for one, speaking as a schoolmaster, would refuse to undertake the task of training these sullen and ignorant young barbarians, who in a few years’ time will be exercising the full privileges of citizens.’ —I pause for a reply.”

“ That last sentence aint in it, is it ? ” I asked.

“ No,” said Erne, laughing, “ but it should be, in the fitness of things. The fault of the report is that it is all through too much in the ‘ Romans, countrymen, and lovers,’ style. Joe is uncertain of himself, afraid of some old lurking bit of slang or vernacular turning up and undoing him when he don’t expect it ; and so he wraps up all his excellent common-sense in fine words.

Never mind ; the set he is in now will soon cure him of that. Well, and how is Emma ?”

“Emma? She is very well ; she seems not to like Palmerston. Joe is never at home, and, when he is, is utterly preoccupied. Since his evidence before that commission, and the order for him to make a special report, he has been utterly unfit to attend to the slightest domestic arrangement. She says he would never get fed if it wasn’t for her.”

“He will be Secretary before he dies. What a capacity for work there is in him, as well as genius. My father used to remark it. Noble old Joe !”

“And how have you been, my dear friend ?” I asked.

“I have been well enough, Jim. But I am not comfortable.”

“No ?”

“Why, no. The people I am with don’t suit me.”

“The Claytons ?”

“Yes. I like *him* very well. He is an honest, reckless fellow, a master of his business. He has a great horror of a man who drinks, or a man who reads. —‘I never knew any good come of reading,’ he continually says ; ‘my dear sir, you will never succeed unless you give it up. It’s worse than drinking, in my opinion.’—And he is quite in earnest. Ha ! ha !”

"But about *Mrs. Clayton*!" I asked.

"Well I don't know. There's something odd about her. A *Je ne sais quoi*, a sort of Haymarket air altogether. But she was not so bad till Mrs. Quickly came."

"Mrs. Quickly!" I cried out.

"Yes. Oh, by the bye, she says she knows all of you. I forgot. Yes, Mrs. Quickly has come and taken up her quarters there, altogether."

"What does Clayton say to that?"

"Oh, he approved of it at first, there being no family. 'You see, sir,' he said to me, 'It's as well to have some company for her. It is very dull for a woman in the bush without children.'"

"Take care of Mrs. Quickly, Erne."

"Oh, you needn't caution me," said Erne, laughing. "I know the cut of her ladyship's cap. Unluckily, Mrs. Quickly is troubled with a sinking in her inside, and requires stimulants, which has resulted in this, that neither Mrs. Quickly nor Mrs. Clayton are ever exactly sober. Mrs. Quickly being, I suppose, the more seasoned vessel, carries her drink in a more workman-like manner than Mrs. Clayton. When Mrs. Quickly is sufficiently intoxicated to throw herself into my arms and kiss me, you generally find that Mrs. Clayton has been forced to go and lie down. As for old Parkins, he

never gets drunk. Drink what he will it makes no difference to *him*."

"Does Clayton know of this?"

"Yes, but he hasn't strength of mind to stop it entirely. He is exceedingly attached and devoted to his wife. He says that, as soon as he can get rid of Mrs. Quickly, it will be all right again; she never did it till that woman came. But Mrs. Quickly won't go. Parkins says she has got the whip hand of Mrs. Clayton, and knows when she is well off."

"I dare say. But who is Parkins?"

"Parkins? Oh, why he is Parkins. He is a queer-looking card; but very agreeable, remarkably well-bred. He came there after Mrs. Quickly at first, I believe, but took such a fancy to me that he has been there a good deal. Clayton says he will leave me his fortune. He is very well off, looking for an investment."

"I hope you may be his heir."

"I have very little hope, Hammersmith; for, however excellent his testamentary intentions may be, I doubt whether he will have an opportunity of carrying them into execution for the next forty years. He looks like a liver."

"Cannot he stop this miserable drinking?"

"He does all he can, to do him justice; but somehow he seems afraid of Mrs. Quickly. The whole lot

of them, with the exception of Clayton, have just the air of people who have made their fortunes by robbing poor-boxes. Nice sort of company for a young gentleman of my bringing up : I don't much care about it so long as they don't kick up a row, but I am getting very tired of it. I shall make a bolt one of these days."

That evening Erne and I took a walk together up the Brougham river. It is an exception to the majority of rivers in Australia, for, being snow-fed, and coming to a great extent through limestone, it keeps up a full crystal current through the hottest summer. It is the favourite resort of the lovers of Romilly to this day, for it is so deeply embowered in fern-tree and lightwood that one may sit in the shade and dream of cool English woods in August : dream only like her who

" — Woke, and the babble of the stream  
Fell, and without the steady glare " —

But, however, fern-trees and lightwood must do, where oak and elm are unprocurable.

The Brougham is popular, too, as a resort for anglers ; those pretty little salmonidæ, which are so singularly like grayling, leaving the large river, the Erskine, prefer the more aerated waters of the Brougham and swarm up it in thousands. As we passed along the bank which wound up the valley near the river, we saw many of our neighbours bathing and fishing ; but, getting farther

from the town we seemed to leave life behind us, and began to think we were alone in the forest : when, coming to a deep pool, in a turn of the river, walled in with dark shrubs and feathering tree-ferns, we came on a solitary man, who sat on a log fishing by himself : on seeing whom, Erne exclaimed, "Hollo ! why *here's* Parkins," and, going up to him, and having affectionately shaken hands, sat down and began a conversation.

Mr. Parkins was affectionately glad to see Erne, but the principal expression of his face was that of intense amusement—amusement at my expense, for I was standing looking at him and at Erne with staring eyes and open mouth. This Mr. Parkins, this new friend of Erne's, was no less a person than my cousin Samuel.



## CHAPTER V.

## EMMA'S VISIT.

"THIS is my friend Mr. Burton," said Erne.

"I formerly had the acquaintance of Mr. James Burton," said Samuel sarcastically; "nay, on one occasion I took the liberty of saving his life."

I blushed, and stammered out some commonplace. I was not quite sure that I had not done a rather ill-conditioned act in passing him before on many occasions without speaking to him. I hoped he was well.

He was quite satisfied at once, and began to talk kindly. He congratulated me on my approaching marriage; and, although he must have been considerably disconcerted and annoyed at the impending discovery, by Erne, of the fact that his refined friend, Mr. Parkins, was identical with the transported valet of his brother; yet he never showed the slightest annoyance or vexation, but talked indifferently about his sport and about the weather, until we rose to walk homeward.

Erne was immensely astonished when I eagerly announced the fact to him ; but he was quite as much amused as surprised.

"This completes the Clayton *ménage*," he said. "What an exceedingly funny lot of people we are ! I am charmed at this discovery. I will pick Master Samuel's brains no end about his convict experiences. It will determine me to stay on with Clayton. Fancy being on intimate terms with a convict. But does it not strike you as curious that he and I should be accidentally thrown together ?"

"I see nothing curious in it whatever," I said. "It is plain to me that he has found out where you are, and, taking advantage of this careless bush hospitality, has introduced himself into the house with you, for his own purposes. He has intentions with regard to you, but he is far too unfathomably cunning to let you know what they are. He is going to bid for a farm here."

"No ; is he ?"

"So they say. He is waiting here for the land sale."

"And when is that ?"

"Next week. My father is going to buy heavily."

"I thought Dawson bought up every thing here-about."

"He is not going to bid against my father."

"That is a singular concession on his part. He is

mad about Port Romilly. I know this for a fact : before the last great land sale a man had squatted on one of the lots, and had made money in some way or another. Dawson went to him and said, 'My man, I understand you are going to bid for this lot.' The man said yes, he was going to run it up. 'You can run it up if you like,' said Dawson, 'but, if you do, you'll run yourself off it ; for I'll have it if it costs 30,000*l*. You stay at home the day of the land-sale, and you may keep this house over your head ; but go anigh that court that day, and out of this you go the week after.' The man wisely stayed at home, I believe."

I said, "Yes, the story is true. But, on my father's mentioning his wish to own land here, Mr. Dawson immediately said that he would withdraw from competing for the lots which my father fancied. And so there is a fair chance for him, though he is desperately anxious about it."

"What sort of land is he going to buy ?"

"A patch of 500 acres on the north slope of the Cape Wilberforce Mountain, about three miles from the sea. You passed it on the road coming here. A mile back. There's a burnt hut on it."

"It is poor land."

"No, capital vine land, with that aspect."\*

\* A northerly aspect at the Antipodes is of course the same as southern one here.

"I wish him joy with it. I cannot sufficiently admire the generous liberality of our honourable friend Dawson. Why, my dear boy, that land would starve a bandicoot."

"How do you know?"

"Why, innocent! if you will get any bushman to tell you that that land covered with *Eucalyptus dumosus*, vulgarly called Mallee, and exceedingly stunted specimens of that, will grow anything, I will tell him he knows nothing. Your father is, in my opinion, ill advised."

And so the conversation dropped. About ten days after it was held I was married. Only the very night before, a steamer came in from Palmerston and brought Emma. She could not help coming, she said, and had altered her mind the very last thing. The steamers between Melbourne and Palmerston would call regularly at Port Romilly now. That was so very nice to think of, wasn't it? It made her feel the separation less. Only three days would bring her among us at any time, in case of illness or anything. And such a beautiful voyage, she said. The sky was so bright, and the great ocean-roll so long and so gentle. She had sat on the deck all day and all night, watching the coast. There had been long stretches of low sand-beach in some places, and then a majestic cape. Sometimes the land piled itself up into awful tiers of dark forest, one rising behind the other;

and sometimes these would break away, and show low rolling plains stretching into the interior, with faint blue mountains beyond. There were islands, too, which one sailed through, on which the foot of man had never rested since the world began ; some low some high and fantastically-shaped ; but all covered with clouds of clanging sea-birds, and ringed with the leaping silver surf which never slept. "Sometimes, darling," she continued—for we were alone together, and the house was all asleep save us two, and her head was on my shoulder—"Sometimes I thought that I would pray that after death my soul might take the form of one of those wild sea-doves, and hover and float in the wind and the sunshine, free of care. I will come and sit on your shoulder, dear, and you will know that it is me, won't you?"

"I would sooner have you as you are, my sister."

"Jim, sometimes I am weary of my life. My task is too much for me ; I wish I was at rest. I miss all the home faces. I miss you, dear. I miss our mother, and I am utterly alone in Palmerston. And oh, brother, I love him so dearly ! The sight of him to-day has been so precious ! Oh ! what shall I do ? What shall I do ?"

I did not dare to ask her to forego her resolution now. This was not the time to urge Erne's suit. Her mood was far too serious and sacred a one to be interfered with by any personal whim of my own. Not only did

I feel this, but she knew that I felt it, and opened her heart to me in perfect confidence. I only told her that I loved her better than any other woman in the world, save one. I only begged her forgiveness for any clumsiness of expression, by which I might have hidden my love for her. I only comforted her with hopes such as I could give. Things might alter in many ways ; and there might be a brighter future. After a time she grew calm again, and she sat with her head on my shoulder through the short summer night, until the crystal dawn flashed upon the tree tops, and told me that the morning of my marriage was come.

And in the morning she and Erne parted. When will they meet again ? Ah ! when ?

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE LAND SALE.

MY marriage was a most unnoticeable one. The sort of thing that is just worth mentioning, nothing more. It has nothing to do with the story whatever.

I do not think that I should have taken the trouble to mention it at all, had it not been for this. There was a little cloud over it, and that cloud hung in the very last place where I liked to see a cloud, for it was in my father's face. He approved of the business in every way. We were getting rich and prosperous. He loved my pretty little sweetheart with all the chivalrous devotion of his great gentleman's soul; but there was a cloud on his face, which reflected itself on mine. I thought I had penetration enough to find out the cause which threw its shadow there.

Trevittick had been a good and faithful partner to us, and, in spite of his moroseness and his fanaticism, we had got to be very fond of him. Morose he was at

times, but he was never unkind : his devotion to my mother was that of a true gentleman ; and his kindness to the younger ones, children no longer now, was most fatherly and genial. Fred, in fact, put him as A 1 in his affections since the loss of Erne. But now it seemed evident to me, wise man that I was, that poor Trevittick had stepped a little beyond the limits of fanaticism, and was rapidly becoming lunatic. I also perceived that my father was perfectly aware of the fact, but would not open his lips, even to me, in hopes of a favourable change in the poor fellow's malady.

This was, as I thought, the reason of the shadow on my father's face at the time of my wedding ; and I was sorry to be obliged to confess to myself, after close watching of Trevittick's behaviour, that there was only too good reason for it.

I cannot remember the exact time when I first noticed decided symptoms of his aberration ; but it was long before my marriage. It was a Sunday, though, for he had been in the bush all day alone : which was a habit he acquired soon after our arrival at Port Romilly. He had gained so much influence over my father that my father used to allow him to expound a chapter and give an extempore prayer the first thing every Sunday morning. After this he used to depart into the bush, and only come home late at night, leaving my father to



blunder through the Litany, and an orthodox sermon before his family as best he might ; which was not very well, for my father's education had been limited, and the slowest of Bible clerks might have given him half the distance, and said Amen before him, easily. On this particular Sunday, when I first thought him cracked, Trevittick was later home than usual. There was no one up but myself, and, when he came in, having taken a long draught of cold tea (he was a strict teetotaller) he sat down opposite me, lit his pipe, and told me that on that very morning he had arrived at the unalterable conviction that he was condemned to everlasting reprobation.

I asked him why.

He said that hitherto he had always believed himself convinced of sin, and regenerate ; that he had believed himself possessed of a lively faith. But that the only proof of a lively faith was works ; that he believed with the rest of the Brianites that the elect could not sin, whereas he, ever since he had come to Port Romilly, had been a habitual Sabbath-breaker ; that his faith, not having resulted in works, was not lively ; that therefore he was condemned everlastingly. And not only that ; he had had a revelation. It had come to him as he was sitting that very day by the burnt hut. There came a shiver of wind through the shrubs, and a voice

spoke in his heart as it went by, and told him this:— that the Unmentionable Sin was to believe yourself elect when you were not so, and he had committed this sin.

I tried to combat all this midsummer madness as best I might. I spoke such platitudes to him as I could lay hold of at the time ; but my arrows were very few, and drawn from all sorts of quivers. To flatter his humour, I told him that there was little doubt but that he had fallen away from original righteousness, as we all had done. I recommended him to read “Winslow on Personal Declension and Revival,” a book which I confessed I had found tough myself, but which would suit his case exactly. And so I went on, trying to argue against a dull, settled, obstinate fanaticism, until I lost my temper, and told him that, if there were an unforgivable sin, he would find that it consisted in doubting the sufficiency of the great Sacrifice ; which was probably the only piece of good sense which I uttered during the argument.

But it had no effect ; he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and left me with an expression of calm scorn. The next Sunday he rambled away just the same ; and I, sitting up for him after every one else was gone to bed, had another innings with him, in which I got completely worsted.

He was equally assured of his own condemnation.

Nothing could ever shake that conviction. Condemnation was to be everlasting ; no reasonable man could doubt that. But he said that he would not condescend to allow this conviction to make the very least alteration in his morality. His life had always been blameless (and indeed he was right), and it should continue to be so. He would continue this sin of Mammon worship on the Sabbath, because it would benefit others, and might keep them from temptation. Otherwise he would watch the uprightness of his walking more closely than ever.

In my desperation I asked him why should he do so.

He answered scornfully, "Had I any proper pride? Was I only righteous from fear of punishment? And suppose it came into God's great scheme that I should be punished everlastingly, either for an example, or for some deep hidden reason, was I therefore to doubt the goodness and justice of God?" I had nothing to say, but I felt inclined to say with Polonius, "If this be madness, there is method in it." But I didn't.

The next phase of his lunacy—one which had not, to my knowledge, made its appearance before, but which seems to me to be the somewhat natural result of the state of mind which I have attempted to describe—was this: He became abjectly superstitious. He began to revive all the old west country witch-quackeries,

which his religion had taught him to consider not quackeries, but arts of the devil. For instance, he got Fred to hold a lot of ink in his hand, under the new moon, and look into it, to see what he saw. That dear boy instantly saw Guy Fawkes and the devil walking arm in arm over Battersea Bridge, which, however interesting in a scientific point of view, led to no practical results; and Fred, being naturally seized with a panic, made himself all over "a gore of ink," as my mother expressed it—she having stepped in with an absolute veto against the repetition of any such unorthodox manœuvres. I expected at this time to find him using the famous Cornish superstition of the divining rod, but, to my astonishment, he spoke of it with unutterable scorn, as a mere delusion of ignorant and unscientific quacks.

He grew worse, as I said, just about the time of my marriage: he would start up in the night and pray, and make strange incomprehensible ejaculations. Tom Williams had often considerable difficulty in getting him quiet again. But the most awful night that Tom had with him was the night before the land sale: it reacted on my father so that I was afraid he would scarcely get through the day's business. Trevittick seemed possessed of a dumb devil, and spent the whole night in walking silently up and

down, with a short snatching gait, like a tiger in its cage. Tom said it was worse than any trick he had played him, and nearly scared him to death. Trevittick looked very ghastly the morning of the sale too; the dark brown in his complexion remained, but the red was all gone, and he looked more like an unhealthy mulatto than a rich-coloured Cornishman.

Everybody was up early, with a full determination to make holiday of it; for land sales were few and far between in those days; and this one, coming a few days before Christmas, would make a very good starting point for the Christmas saturnalia. The young men caught their horses, and rode about; or, if they had no horses of their own, borrowed some one else's. At the same time was begun a long, objectless, and incomprehensible game of cricket, in the which a man, by dexterous manœuvring, might have sixteen or seventeen innings; and which lasted from cockcrow to long after curfew. At the same time also everybody began to bathe, and kept on bathing while they were not riding about or cricketing, all day. Harry confided to me that he had been "in" eight times. At about nine o'clock the black fellows arrived, and the dogs began barking "as though there were bears in the town," and barked on until the black fellows left late in the afternoon.

At about ten the auctioneer arrived, and with him the Hon. Mr. Dawson. Soon after this all the elders of the township adjourned into the little court-house to look at the plans, and I, having been married a week, felt several degrees more dignified than the Governor, and took my place among the others with becoming gravity. After some time the court was filled, and the business began. Mr. Dawson sat next the auctioneer, and, just as he began to speak, my cousin, Samuel, dressed in black, came up and thrust himself in among the foremost.

"Here's the devil come for old Jack! Dawson," said some one who was standing in the crowd, and everybody laughed, for my friend Mr. Dawson's popularity was not high in the township. The auctioneer began: "Silence, gentlemen, pray silence."

"Silence yourself, you old scrubber," was the polite rejoinder, the gentleman who spoke being slightly in liquor. "What's the good of such a farce as this here? Why, there sits old Jack Dawson, the blacksmith, with his pockets full of money, ready to buy up the whole boiling, scot and lot; while a poor man can't get a bit of land to put his foot on. He is going to be king at Port Romilly, mates; and we're to be his humble servants. Blow that, I say."

There was a murmur of discontent through the hall.

I saw Mr. Dawson wince; for he could not bear unpopularity. The first lot was put up, a lot of twenty acres, with frontage on the Erskine. After a brisk competition it was knocked down to my cousin Samuel, for the high sum of ten pounds an acre. Mr. Dawson did not compete.

Neither did he for the next lot, or the next. It was plain that he had been affected by the sarcasms of the drunken man, and the evident applause with which they were received. All the lots with wharfage along the Erskine went without a sign from him: and next the land further back towards the Cape Wilberforce mountain, was put up. "Your father is mad," Erne said to me. "He is letting his fortune slip away under his eyes: why on earth don't he bid? All the best land is going. Do pray him to bid for this she-oak lot; it's only 640. Why, it would grow 40 bushels to the acre; I was over it yesterday."

My father's folly did seem to me incomprehensible. I pushed through to him, and pointed out what Erne had said. He was very pale and anxious; but all I could get out of him was, "All right, old man, leave it to me."

As the sale went on there was less and less competition, as the land grew both poorer in quality from being nearer the mountain, and being further removed

from the river and the bay. Several lots just under the mountain went for the upset price ; and at last the sale was nearly concluded, and the people began to go out. Three lots remained to be sold, and these three comprised a large portion of the mountain itself. As lot 67 was mentioned, I saw my father and Mr. Dawson exchange glances, and everybody began to be funny.

"Lot 67, gentlemen," began the auctioneer, "a most eligible lot, gentlemen. If you were to ask me my opinion, as between man and man, I should say the most eligible lot which I have had the honour of tempting you with to-day. 1280 acres, or shall we say, two of 640. The soil, though not fertile, is dry, the situation is elevated, the air invigorating and salubrious, and the scenery romantic. On a clear day, as I am informed by our venerable and respected harbour-master, the light-house on Cape Pitt is distinctly visible to the naked eye."

Somebody said that with a glass you might see old Jack Dawson sanding the men's sugar at Myrnong, sixty miles off. This unexpected attack on my unoffending friend resulted in a violent and acrimonious personal fracas between Mr. Dawson and the gentleman who had so rudely assailed him, in which several joined ; during which the honourable gentleman so



far forgot himself in the heat of debate as to say, that 'if he got any more cheek from him, or any other carrotty-haired, 'possum-headed, forty-acre, post and rail son of a seacock, he would knock his head into the shape of a slushlump in about two minutes.' Peace being restored in about ten minutes, and the Hon. Mr. Dawson being left in a great heat, the auctioneer went on with the description of the lot, only once interrupted by the Hon. Mr. Dawson, suddenly, irrelevantly, and gratuitously informing the company, in a loud and defiant voice, that he would find a young smith, not twenty-one, who should fight the best man in that room for a hundred pound a side.

Much as I was flattered by this proof of my friend's confidence, I was glad no one came forward. The auctioneer concluded.

"Now whom can I tempt with this lot? Can I tempt you, Mr. Dawson?"

"Yes, you can, sir," retorted the still angry Mr. Dawson. "And I'll have this lot, sir, and my friend Mr. Burton shall have the next, sir, if it cost fifty thousand pound, sir. Now. And, if any individual chooses to run this lot up out of spite, sir, whether that individual has red hair or green hair, sir, I will punch that individual's head immediately after the

termination of these proceedings, sir, and knock it against the blue stone and mortar which compose the walls of this court-house. Now, sir."

However, nobody, I suppose, caring to get his head punched for a whim, the lot was knocked down to him, and immediately afterwards my father stepped forward looking as white as a sheet.

"Now we come to lot 68, commonly known by your fellow-townsmen as the Burnt Hut lot; exactly similar to lot 67, just knocked down to the Hon. Mr. Dawson, as a site for his new country house. Now who would like to have our honoured legislative councillor for a neighbour? What gentleman of fortune can I tempt with this lot? The lot is up. At one pound an acre. Will any one bid one pound an acre?"

"I will," said my father, in a queer, hoarse voice. I saw that he was moistening his dry lips with his tongue. I began to grow deeply interested, half frightened.

"Going at a pound. Come, gentlemen, if any one is going to bid, be quick. It is the last lot."

There were but few left: and no one of them spoke. The hammer came down, and I saw Mr. Dawson clutch my father's arm.

"The land is yours, Mr. Burton. If you'll be good enough to step up and sign, I'll be able to get on as

far as Stawell to-night. There is a good deal of snow-water coming down the Eldon this hot weather, and I don't like that crossing place after dark."

Thanks to James Oxton's excellent conveyancing bill, lands with a title direct from the Crown were transferred to the purchaser in about ten minutes. In that time my father was standing outside the court-house, with his papers in his hand, with Mr. Dawson beside him.

"Where's Trevittick?" almost whispered Mr. Dawson.

"Go seek him at home, Jim, and fetch him here," said my father in the same tone.

I went quickly home with a growing awe upon me. Every one was behaving so queerly. My awe was not dissipated by my finding Trevittick, with his head buried in the blankets, praying eagerly and rapidly, and Tom Williams standing by as pale as a ghost.

"This is the way he has been carrying on this last hour," said poor Tom. "I can't make nothing of him at all."

I went up to him and roused him. "Trevittick," I said, "father has got the bit of land he wanted."

He jumped up and clutched me by both arms. "Jim," he said, "if you're lying—. If you're lying— If you're lying —."

We went out and joined the two others, and all walked away towards the hill in silence. The boys were bathing, the cricketers were shouting, and the quaint-scattered village bore a holiday look. The neighbours were all sitting out at their doors, and greeted us as we went by: but yet everything seemed changed to me since the morning. I almost dreaded what was to come, and it seems to me now that it all happened instantaneously.

We crossed the low lying lands which had been sold that day, and came to our own—a desolate, unpromising tract, stretching up the side of the mountain which formed Cape Wilberforce, about three miles from the sea. The land bought by Mr. Dawson was similar to our own, separated from it by a rib of trap rock; both lots were just as Erne described them, but ours was rather the rockier of the two.

It was soon over. Trevittick took a hammer and some gads from behind a rock, and, going up to a low ledge, set them in, and began working furiously. Once he struck aside and hit the rock, and the rock, instead of clinking, gave forth a dull thud. In a few minutes Trevittick had succeeded in detaching a piece about two feet square, the broken side of which shone strangely in the sun. It was a mass of solid, gleaming virgin copper.


The murder was out now. With the exception of one on Lake Superior, and one in South Australia, my father was the proprietor of the richest copper mine in the world.

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE BURNT HUT COMPANY.

THE following are some extracts from the leader of the *Palmerston Sentinel* a short time after the affair of the sale :—

“Athenæus, in his ‘Deipnosóphists,’ tells us that the ancient Carians used, at the annual festivals of Venus, to crown with rosemary the luckiest man of his year in front of the principal temple. For public ceremonies of this kind we are not wholly unprovided. As Rome had her Forum, Athens her Areopagus, Corinth her Sisipheum; so Palmerston has her Government Block. Let Mr. James Burton, the Port Romilly blacksmith, be carried up there; let him be crowned with a wreath of Kennedya; for assuredly such fortunes as his, scarce ever befell one of the ‘Audax Iapeti genus’ before. A discovery has transpired, in the fertile and salubrious district of Port



Romilly, which promises to elevate Palmerston into one of the principal commercial emporiums of the civilized globe. The bullock's-hide of Dido which first traced the walls of the future Carthage will in future go down to posterity with the theodolite of Captain Snig, the gallant and intelligent engineer officer who first traced the streets of Palmerston; and the venerable and vivacious statesman whose name it bears, must be content to share futurity with the city to which he stood 'in loco parentis.' 'O, si angulus iste!' have we been exclaiming, ever since the foundation of the colony. We have been blessed with fertile lands, with full-fed rivers, with boundless forests, with numberless flocks and herds. We have made a material progress greater than that of any nation in ancient or modern times. One thing had been denied to us. One thing made us jealous of South Australia, to which colony we are in all other respects, physical and moral, so vastly superior. We wanted mineral wealth—and we have got it. Yes. It may be attempted to be denied, but it is true. A Cornish miner, named Trevittick, has discovered that the whole of the Cape Wilberforce mountain is in an eminent degree cupriferous. In Burnt Hut Gully, purchased last week for twelve hundred and eighty pounds by Mr. James Burton, an enormous outcrop of pure metal itself takes place,

similar to those on Lake Superior. On the next lot, Morepork Gully, bought at the same time, for the same price, by the Hon. Mr. Dawson, a small quarry, which has been opened, exhibits a mass of blue and green carbonates, eighteen feet thick. Negotiations are being attempted to be gone into for the purchase of Mr. Burton's claims, and his payment in shares, but without success hitherto. Mr. Trevittick considers that, as soon as he can get to work, he will raise a matter of four thousand tons of ore, of one kind and another the first year."

So said the *Sentinel*. Mr. O'Callaghan of the *Mohawk* knew that the *Sentinel* would have a lot of classical allusions, and determined to have a bit of Latin of his own ; but his first classical gentleman had gone to a cricket-match, and so he had to do it himself, which was exceedingly awkward. However, he came of one of the bravest families of the bravest nation in the world, and, on the Galway fox-hunting rule of "either over it or through it," went at it manfully, seeing the hateful Mr. Dawson beyond, and savagely thirsting for his blood. His style, the intelligent reader will observe, if it is without the polish of that of Mr. Dickson of the *Sentinel*, is not wanting in a certain vigour of its own :—




“‘*Diabolus curat propriis,*’ says the blessed St. Columb, in his ‘Hours and Meditations’—‘*Sus tranquillus bibit lactem,*’ our venerable Malachi used to observe, giving a wicked wink with the eye of him the while, in sly allusion to Brian the Mighty himself. Old Jack Dawson, the blacksmith, is in luck again, and, by means of a rather nastier job than usual, he has doubled, nay quadrupled, his hitherto enormous wealth.

“It appears that Dawson’s time, during his late visit to England, was passed, while not at Buckingham Palace, or *elsewhere*, in the smiddy of a somewhat blockish blacksmith, who has been unfortunate in business, and with whom Dawson discovered an infinite fund of fellow-feeling. This man and his family came out in the same ship with him; he was a great deal in their company at Palmerston, and finally he established them in business at Port Romilly, a place at which he had bought up every available acre of land, in anticipation of what has happened.

“He had bought up every piece of land but the right one, it appears. The smith Burton made the discovery, and determined on this plan for swindling the colony, and in gratitude for favours received, offered Dawson half the plunder. Dawson, with true squatter meanness, accepted it.

"The short and the long of it is, that this man has discovered in Port Romilly a mountain, calculated to be sixteen times as big as Slieve Donad, and fourteen times as ugly as the Protestant cathedral, of solid copper from top to bottom, and he and old Dawson have bought the whole thing for an old song. The affair is about as ugly a looking thing as we have seen for a long time, and, if we mistake not, Dawson will be called on, in his place in the Upper House, to give certain personal explanations ; but, nevertheless, there are some considerations of a pleasant nature associated with it. In future, not only shall we supply the manufacturers of Yorkshire with the fleecy spoils of the merino of Spain—or even, in time, the yet more priceless wools sheared from the back of the llama of Thibet—but the copper-smelting trade of South Wales will receive a new impetus by our enormous exports of copper, and London may yet see with envy, Swansea, a mightier metropolis than herself, arise on the shores of the Bristol Channel—a metropolis nearer to, and more influenced by, the irradiating centre of human thought at Dublin."

Mr. O'Ryan was terribly angry at this article. He swore that, if O'Callaghan ever dared to write another article without having it looked over by a competent



authority, he would start another radical paper himself. Words passed between the two gentlemen, and, if it had not been for Miss Burke, they would have fought what O'Callaghan called a "jule" about it. The *Sentinel* got hold of the "llama of Thibet," and made great fun of it, and the *Mohawk* was getting the worst of the fight, when the eagle eye of Mr. O'Ryan caught the quotation from Athenæus about the ancient Carians, and the more he looked at it the less he liked it. There might have been a building at Corinth recently disinterred, but he thought the quotation from Athenæus was the weak place after all. He had the gravest scholastic suspicion of it. The Sisipheum at Corinth looked queer, very queer, although he knew that that gentleman was connected with the town; but this looked queerer still. The question was, was there such a thing as an Athenæus in the colony? The Roman Catholic bishop, on being appealed to, had not one, but he was good enough to step round to his Anglican brother, who, to his great delight, had one. O'Ryan carried it off to the *Mohawk* office in triumph. By three o'clock in the morning the first classical gentleman was in a position to report that there was no such passage whatever in the whole book. The next moment O'Callaghan hurriedly drained a tumbler of whiskey-punch, seized his pen,

and rushed to his desk with a snarl like an angry tiger. By daybreak he had sent his copy downstairs and had walked out into the fresh morning air. The most polite term applied to the quotation from Athenæus was "scoundrelly forgery;" and the quarrel between the two papers continued for a long while, until, in fact, something happened which gave the colony something else to think of with a vengeance. It was the discovery of gold in New South Wales. But we shall have occasion to discourse of this presently.

The real truth about the discovery of the Burnt Hut copper-mine can be told very shortly. It was Trevittick's doing from beginning to end. He had been brought up a miner, or rather a mining-blacksmith. His father had been captain of a mine; and mining details, and mining speculations, had been familiar to him from his youth. In addition to this he had acquired, what his father possibly had not, a tolerable working knowledge of geology; and, having got himself up in that science and in working mechanics, not to mention a little mathematics, he, by way of bringing his science to bear, came to London—and shoed omnibus horses. By the curious accident of the man's getting so far attached to us as to follow us to Australia, his knowledge was brought to

bear in a most singular way. At the first glimpse of the dolomite wall, he tells me, he began to get restless, and then (not to be tedious) he noticed the fact that all the various formations tended towards one point, Cape Wilberforce, and, when he neared that, he saw that it was nothing more than a great trap-dyke. After this, he says, if he had found a mountain of solid gold, he would not have been surprised.

Trevittick had a poor nose for gold. Those who have been in at the most glorious sport in the world—gold-hunting—may laugh at him. But he had a nose like a beagle for metals of some sort or another. He would have died sooner than break into a day's work; and hence came his Sunday rambles, and the self-accusatory frame of mind which I described in the last chapter, and which I at the time mistook for madness. Most people who have any brains, any power of original thought whatever, get more or less perplexed and illogical when the necessity comes upon them for breaking through old settled rules, hitherto considered as necessary to the scheme of the universe. I remember well the annoyance, vexation, and sulki-ness, produced on a young Oxford gentleman who came to us at Port Romilly by the loss of an irreplaceable tooth-brush in the bush. He went so far

as to refuse his breakfast. (He got over it by dinner-time, but he was a man of singular strength of character.) Now, if a highly-educated Oxford gentleman finds his balance so far disturbed by the loss of his tooth-brush, and by the utter impossibility (he not being a Frenchman) of using anybody else's, how can we wonder at Trevittick, the first article of whose creed was a strict observance of what he chose to call the Sabbath, being thrown off his balance by his being forced into a desecration of that sacred day?

He says that he was a long while before he got any indications whatever of either copper or lead. He was afraid to dig, and used only to prospect by chipping the rocks with a hammer. He had, however, many supernatural indications of the place made to him, but was too stupid to attend to them. Once a magpie had met him, and tried to make him follow it towards the place. Another time, on going over the place, his attention was called to it by a large black snake, which was actually coiled up on it; but, in his blindness and hardness of heart, he had killed the poor innocent creature, as he called this horribly venomous reptile, and so the truth was still kept from him. At last, one day, coming through a wood hard by, he had met a grey doe kangaroo, with her little one; she had skipped along, about fifty yards before

him, beckoning to him to follow ; he followed, and they led him to the Burnt Hut lot, and stopped when they came to the rock. Then the little one, the "Joey," had opened its mother's pouch and got in, and the mother skipped away with it and looked round no more. It was such a beautiful sight, he said, that he blessed the two pretty beasts in his heart ; and instantly light was vouchsafed him. What he had hitherto taken to be lichen on the rocks, he now perceived to be green carbonate of copper.

He announced the discovery to my father at once, who had a terrible time with him. My father got it into his head that his duty forced him to reveal the secret to Mr. Dawson. This, in Trevittick's mind, was sheer and absolute ruin. He was firmly assured that Mr. Dawson would bid over their heads, and that all their bright prospects would vanish for ever. My father knew Mr. Dawson better. He talked over Trevittick, who sulkily acquiesced. Mr. Dawson was not unprepared for the result ; he himself was aware of the existence of copper on some land of his own not a mile distant, and at once not only refused to compete with my father, but offered to advance him money to make the purchase. After a generous contest between these uneducated gentlemen, it was decided that they were to share the land between them.

What between Trevittick's distrust of Mr. Dawson and his dread of the discovery leaking out, he was pretty nearly out of his mind during the interval which elapsed before the land-sale. The moment it was over, his mind recovered its usual tone, and, although he used to tell, and firmly believe, such stories as that about the kangaroo, yet he confined this midsummer madness of his entirely to ghostly matters, and, as far as practical matters were concerned, was as shrewd and clever a manager as one could wish to have.

The Burnt Hut Copper Mining Company, consisted (ideally) of 2,000 shareholders, at 5*l.* per share. Of these shares, 1,000 were held by my father, 250 by Trevittick, and 250 by myself. The other 500 shares, being thrown into the market, produced 2,500*l.* which was every farthing of working capital we started with. Trevittick raised 6,000 tons of ore in nine months, the net value of which was 72,000*l.*; cost of working under 20,000*l.*; and this 20,000*l.* was in the main spent in prospective works, for, as for the copper, it was simply quarried for the first two years. "We shall do better next year, gentlemen," said Trevittick to the meeting of the shareholders, when shares had gone up from 5*l.* to 150*l.* in the market, and yet most of them held on like "grim death." "When I get into the ten-fathom level, gentlemen, we shall double all this, unless I am mistaken."




He did in fact so double it, but the depreciation of the cost of copper in Europe, and another circumstance—that of the discovery of gold which raised wages—about counter-balanced the improvement in quantity. Counting from the commencement to the present time, the income we have enjoyed from the mine may be put, taking one year with another, as 17,000*l.* a year to my father, and about 8,000*l.* a year to Trevittick and myself. The first thing Trevittick did with his money was to build a brick chapel in one of the main thoroughfares of Palmerston—so large, so red, and so ugly, that, say the wags, the Governor's horses shied at it, and pitched Lady Bostock into the fishmonger's shop.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE LAST OF THE FORGE.

AND so my father had struck his last stroke at the anvil for ever. One seldom feels joy at times of excitement. Johnson says, and sticks to it, that no man is ever happy but when he is drunk. Without going so far as that, one may say that happiness is mainly prospective and retrospective. How often can one remember to have said, "How happy I *am*," since childhood. *Then* I have been so happy that I could not eat. I particularly remember one summer Sunday that my father had helped me to the brown outside of the roast beef—my favourite piece—but that I was so happy in my anticipation of the afternoon's delight that I couldn't eat it, and carried it out with me in a paper. I know that this first burst of good fortune is not one of the times I look back on in life as the pleasantest; the disturbance of old habits was too great. For one thing, all the children had to be sent off to boarding-school at Pitt, sixty miles away. Our Fred ran away the first



month, and, after incredible adventures, was brought home by the blacks. The parting was a very sad business indeed ; and my mother, in the heat of her feelings, boldly wished all the money at the deuce. Yes, there was a still, sad house that evening ; and I, coming across from my house in the twilight to see the dear old folks, found that they had wandered hand in hand into the forge, and were sitting there on a bench, side by side, silent.

I tried to slip away ; but they had seen me, and made me come in and sit beside them. I felt a great disinclination to speak, and I was glad that my father spoke first.

"Come into us, old chap," he said ; "we've got *you* left, anyhow. This won't make no difference in *you* ; you're always the same, that's one comfort."

"Why, take and drat your money, I say," said my mother, angrily ; "God forgive me if I don't wish the hard times back again ; we could see one another's faces then. Old man, the weariest day I ever had in my life has been this one, when we have just come into more money than we know what to do with. It's hard enough, in all conscience, that Martha and me are to be reduced to keeping servants, and not allowed to touch so much as a carpet broom ; but it's harder to have my children took away just now when I am getting a bit

stiff in the joints. You'll never make a lady of me—not if you was to give me a crown and sceptre, you wouldn't: and a pretty sort of a gentleman *you'll* make, old man. Why, if our boys, as are going to be brought up gentlemen, were like any other boys, they'd be ashamed on you. They *won't*; but that's luck."

"Well, and that's the best luck going, old woman," said my father. "What's the good of hollering out after it's all happened. You and me aint got no call to show. Nobody need know anything about us; we shall be able to go on much as usual, I reckon."

"You're never the same man when you aint at work, old chap," said my mother; "and, as for me, think what my feelings will be to have to sit by and see an awkward slut of a girl messing through the work that I could do so much better myself. And Jim's wife, Martha, too? Look at that girl's charing; why, *I* never see anything like it, with the exception of Mrs. Chittle, who chared Park Villa at the end of a fortnight, nursing two. Take that girl away from her soap and brush, and she'll peak and pine away, if she's the girl I take her for: which she is."

"Well, she don't want to do much charing just now, old woman," growled my father.

"No, but she'll want to after a bit again," said my mother. "In about six weeks she'll have the old feel-

ing come on her strong ; and, mark my words, them as thwarts her thwarts her."

"You'd better have a saucepan and a bit of sandpaper took up to her in bed then," said my father. "Let her polish away at that."

This was undoubtedly a flagrant violation of my mother's rights as a woman ; she wouldn't have stood it from the doctor himself. My father was making fun about subjects of which he was (officially) supposed to be utterly and entirely ignorant. His being the father of nine was nothing. He had shown a tendency to trifle with a subject which no woman worthy of the name will allow to be trifled with by a man for one instant. My mother came down on him.

"It would have been as well, perhaps," she said loftily, "if Mrs. Jim Holmes had not been thwarted in her wish to go to Wandsworth fair ; at least so Mrs. Quickly, an experienced woman, whom I am far from upholding in all things, is of opinion. *She* considers that *that* was the cause of her threatening to chuck the twins out of winder. I would not venture to give my own opinion on any account whatever. Men, you see, have sources of information which are denied to us."

My mother tried to keep her dignity. It would have helped her amazingly had she been able, but she

couldn't. She burst out laughing, and my father and I followed suit. My mother, in the feeble attempt to preserve her dignity, swept out of the forge, and left my father and me alone.

"Cut a nut through and you'll come to the meat," said my father. "Let her talk long enough, and you'll find out her goodness. Well, here's the forge fire out for good and all, and you and me as rich as marquises. This is the last night that you and me will sit together on the forge, old man. We have got the wealth of gentlefolks. I shall never get their manners, but you may. Fetch a candle and read me this here letter. It's from Jack Martin, who is making his fortune on the Sidney side, with the gold. He seems to have repented of his treatment of me, but not of his bad writing. Read it out."

I saw that his fancy was to sit in the shop that night for the last time, and I fetched a candle and read the letter out. I hated Jack Martin. I thought him a worthless, selfish man; but my father's goodness had reflected itself on him; and he was conscious of the injury he had once done my father, and wished to atone for it.

It was dated from Canadian Gully, Ballarat. He had cleared three thousand pounds there, and earnestly pressed us to come. He entered into details; and his

letter was so far important that it was the first reliable intelligence which we had had from the Port Philip goldfields; and, as a matter of curiosity, the next time I wrote to Erne Hillyar, I sent it to him.

## CHAPTER IX.

## ERNE GOES ON HIS ADVENTURES.

ABOUT a fortnight after this the most astonishing accounts from Bendigo appeared in both the *Sentinel* and the *Mohawk*. Three tons of gold had been taken down to Melbourne by the fortnightly escort, and two tons remained in camp for want of carriage.\* But this, according to the *Mohawk*, was nothing at all to Lake Omeo, in the Australian Alps. In an article in which Malachi's collar was duly thrown in the teeth of the low-browed Saxon, the goldfields of Lake Omeo were allowed to surpass the auriferous deposits of the Wicklow mountains, in their palmy times, before trade was paralysed, and enterprise was checked by the arrival of the beastly Dutchman. And really the most astonishing reports of this place seemed to have reached Melbourne from various quarters. The black sand, containing small

\* Fact.



emeralds and rubies, would yield sixty per cent. of pure tin : it was ten and twelve feet thick, and at the bottom of it, in the crannies of the rock, a pound weight of gold had been washed out of a panful. I was still thinking of these extraordinary accounts when Erne came slinging along the road and jumped off his horse at my side.

I thought he had come over to see the works, which were now progressing nobly, but he soon undeceived me.

"Well," he said ; "I've done it !"

"Done what ?"

"I've cut the bush. I'm sick of it. The place is unbearable since your cousin Samuel has given up coming there ; he was the only person worth speaking to. I've read all the books. I'm sick of the smell of sheep ; I'm sick of the sight of a saddle ; I am, oh ! so utterly sick of those long, grey plains. I am sick of being kissed by old Quickly behind the door when she's drunk : I should have had that cap of hers off her head and chucked it on the fire if I had stayed much longer. And now Clayton is getting sulky at the goings on, as well he may ; and so I have come off, and am going to Lake Omeo."

"Think before you do that, my dear Erne."

"I want adventure, excitement, movement of some kind. If I stayed there, moping about Emma much longer, I should go mad. I shall never forget her *there*.

Come with me, old fellow. You are rich enough to do as you like now; come with me."

I don't think I was ever more tempted in my life. It would have been such a glorious adventure, with him. It would have been the finest adventure we had ever had together; but I had to set my teeth, and say "No." There was some one expected, and I couldn't leave my wife.

He was very much disappointed, but did not say another word. He was perfectly bent on going. I knew his romantic impulsiveness of old, and was aware that nothing would turn him.

Trevittick had listened to our conversation and had left us. Tom Williams very soon came up and joined us.

"My eye!" he said, "don't it make your mouth water! Take me with you, Mr. Erne. You and I were always favourites together. Come, let us go."

"Oh, do come, old fellow," said Erne. "Do let me have one face with me in this adventure that I know and like as well as yours. Come, and we will go through it all together to the end. Next to Jim here, I would have chosen you among all men to be my friend and brother in this quest. How glorious the life, the motion, the novelty, the crowds of strange faces will be! What will be the end of it? Where shall we find ourselves at last? Hurrah for the cool, brisk

South; and good-bye to these hot, melancholy forests. Give me your hand, my boy. We are vowed to one another henceforward.

‘It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;  
It may be we shall touch the happy isles,  
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.’”

I cast a look of gratitude at Tom Williams. “But,” I said, “what will Trevittick say?”

“Trevittick,” growled that gentleman, behind me, “will say just what he told Tom Williams just now. That, if he sees that young gentleman go out alone, without one single friend, into the terrible scenes and places he will have to encounter, he never needn’t trouble himself to speak to me no more: and so I tell him.”

And so these two went together. The *Wainoora*, the steamer by which they went, sailed one summer morn at daybreak southward to Palmerston and Melbourne. His last words to me were, “Tell her that I am the same to her till death.” I went up, on to the highest point of the cape, high above the town, and watched the little steamer, steady and true in her course as a star, traversing the great purple rollers of the Indian Ocean, which broke on the coast under her lee in far-heard thunders. Her screw raised a little thread of foam in her wake, and her funnel left a haze of smoke aloft,

which travelled with her, for the wind was fair. I watched her round Cape Windham, and then she was gone, and Erne was gone with her. I turned wearily, with a sigh, and looked northward. Nothing there but the old endless succession of melancholy forest capes, fringed with silver surf; aloft, lazily-floating clouds. They would have a fair passage.

"And so your sister has drove him to the diggings at last, has she?" said a voice behind me. "I guessed she would, all along. She has used him shameful. I wouldn't have cared if it had been only Bendigo, or Ballarat, or the Avoca; but he is going to Omeo; and Omeo and the Buckland are death to such as he. I hope you kissed him when you said good-bye, for you'll none of you see him any more. And a nice mess you've made of it among you."

It was my cousin Samuel, who had crept up behind me. And I turned on him, and asked him what he meant.

"What I say. That sister of yours, with her high-faluting balderdash, has driven that young man out of his mind. I am a poor fallen, wicked old man; but that Erne Hillyar is such a pure, simple, high-souled gentleman, that at times he has made me waver in my purpose, and feel inclined to do what I won't do unless that fellow pushes me too far. He wants

brains, maybe; so do you; but he is the first man I have met for twenty years who, knowing everything, has treated me as an equal. I never met such a fine lad in my life. He has quietly made me ashamed of my old habits, and is the first man who has given me hopes for the future. But he aint good enough for your sister. And she has sent him south to die."

The sun was bright overhead, and the summer wind was whispering gently among the heathers and Hakeas around, and yet it seemed to grow dark, and the wind to get chill, as my cousin left me with these words. He passed slowly down the hill towards his estate, and, entering the wood behind his house, disappeared, and left me to my thoughts.

## CHAPTER X.

JAMES OXTON GOES OUT, AND WIDOW NORTH COMES IN.

JAMES OXTON splashed and floundered through two more sessions after Erne's first arrival in the colony. Sometimes he was up to his knees, sometimes up to his middle; sometimes the enemy said that he was over his head, and that there was the finish and the end of the man, body and bones, and high time too. But, no. On questions of great public utility, his personal prestige, combined with the good sense of the House, and possibly the putting to work of some parliamentary tactics, was still sufficient to carry him through; and James Oxtton managed to follow each Opposition victory by a greater one of his own; and so, although sick of the business altogether, he held on manfully. He was loth to see the work of twenty years, as he thought, ruined.

At last the advanced party brought in a land bill of their own, and lost it by only three votes, including the speaker. It became necessary for James Oxtton

to "go to the country." His Excellency, being a wise Excellency, and therefore unwilling to do what he had the power to do if he chose—to keep in a favourite minister and dear friend against the wishes of the colony—complied with a heavy heart with James Oxtan's request. He dissolved the Assembly, and sent James Oxtan to the country. The country very properly sent him back again with eight votes less than he came with.

The question is much more easily understandable than the Schleswig-Holstein one ; which has come by a rather queer solution, as, "There are more dogs than cats, and therefore the cats must all turn dogs at their peril." The question on which James Oxtan came by what the *Mohawk* called his "downfall" was by no means of a European complexity. In fact, colonial politics are *not* difficult to master, for the simple reason that there are seldom more than two interests at work at the same time ; and that those two interests do so lam, pound, and pummel one another, that, although logic, nay, sometimes, as in England at hot moments, even grammar, may suffer, yet those two interests between them, generally "ventilate" the question most thoroughly ; and, to use a thoroughly Mohawkian catachresis, look over one another's cards, and see which way the cat is going to jump.

The great export of the country was wool. The foundation of its present prosperity was wool. To grow wool with success, enormous tracts must be under the control of one single man. A wool-grower must have 30,000 acres at least under his sole command, and then, on the best of country, he could not safely venture on more than 9,000 sheep; for he might have his run swept by a fire any January night, and be forced to hurry his sheep down to the boiling-house. Now the small farmers, contemptuously called "cockatoos," were the fathers of fire, the inventors of scab, the seducers of bush-hands for hay-making and harvesting, the interlopers on the wool-growers' grass with their cattle and horses. James Oxtou, a "squatter," a wool-grower among wool-growers, had argued thus, and had unworthily blinded himself so far as to legislate for his own class.

In order to prevent the acquisition of land by the labouring classes, he had rigorously resisted every attempt to alter the old land laws. The upset price was one pound an acre, payable at once. Any one could demand and get a special survey of not less than 5,000 acres at that price, without competition; by which mischievous regulation large tracts of the very best land were in the hands of great capitalists: his own estate, "The Bend," was one of these special



surveys, and had increased in value from 5,000*l.* to 30,000*l.* And lastly, the quantity of land thrown into the market was exceedingly limited. In this way, using the money raised by the land sales to assist emigrants, he was creating a lower class, and depressing the price of labour by denying them land.

The radicals had brought in a bill demanding the right of selection of lots as small as eighty acres, and three years' credit in paying for it. This was too liberal, and, in spite of the furious warwhoops of Mr. O'Callaghan, was rejected; Government having a majority of three.

Had James Oxtan, even after the loss of eight votes by the dissolution, brought in a moderate measure of his own, all would have gone well. But, he refusing to move in the matter at all; and there being undoubtedly a strong necessity to attend to the cry of "unlock the lands;" the Radicals brought in their bill, a more moderate one than the last. The House accepted it by a majority of eleven against the Government, and James Oxtan, the moment after the division, announced his resignation amidst the most profound silence.

Though the *Mohawk* said next morning that the brazen head of James Oxtan had been found, like that of the fabled one of Lord Bacon, to have feet of clay; and that when it had gone rolling in the dust, the

oppression of seventeen years was revenged at last: yet still, now it was done, every one was a little bit frightened. The Secretary was so good, and big, and so calm, and had governed the colony so well. And Mr. O’Ryan had formerly made no secret of his intentions. People remembered the programme which he had offered the country five years before, when power had been beyond his grasp; he had concealed his wicked principles lately, but that was his artfulness. *They* remembered his manhood suffrage, and separation from the mother-country. Moderate people began to think they had got into a scrape; but there was Mr. O’Ryan at Government House, and the list would be out that evening.

And, when the list did come out, things did not look much better. There was not an English or a Scotch name in it. The Radical party was officered almost entirely by Irishmen, and the Irishmen had taken care of themselves to the exclusion of the other two nations. Ministers in the House—O’Ryan, Secretary; Murphy, education; Moriarty, trade; and so on. And where was Dempsey? Not in the list at all, but concocting some malignant conspiracy in the background; which was even more dreadful to imaginative people, than if the destinies of the community had been handed over altogether to the tender mercies of that red-

handed rebel. And the inferior appointments too! Rory O'More, Barney Brallagan, and so on! And did anybody ever hear of such a measure as appointing old Lesbia Burke post-master general?

"O'Ryan must suddenly have gone mad, my dear Mr. Burton," said the pretty and clever little widow, Mrs. North, to our old friend, Joe, as they sat on a sofa, side by side, reading the list together, with their heads very nearly touching.

Joe, now the prosperous and wealthy Mr. Burton, had been elected for North Palmerston at the last election, and the night before had spoken for the first time. He had spoken so wisely and so well as to command the greatest attention and respect. He had counselled moderation on both sides, and the style of his speech pointed him out at once as a man of the very highest class.

The place where they were sitting was Mrs. Oxton's drawing-room; the time twilight. Emma and Mrs. Oxton had gone to the opera, and the Secretary was shouting at play with his boy at the other end of the garden. They were alone.

"O'Ryan must suddenly have gone mad, my dear Mr. Burton."

"Not the least, my dear madam. He only wanted to avoid the fate of Actæon. He would have been

torn to pieces by his following, if he hadn't placed every one possible. You see Dempsey has refused office, to leave one more place vacant and satisfy one more claimant; and, as it is, there must be two or three dozen unsatisfied. He has done the best he can."

"He is a man of great ability," said the widow.

"A first-rate man, if he had some one to keep him quiet, to let him talk and prevent his going too far in action; the second man in the colony."

"I know who promises to be the third," said the widow, very quietly.

Joe blushed and laughed. "What a really beautiful face he has," said the widow to herself. "What a pity it is about his poor dear back."

"You spoke so splendidly last night," she went on. "If you could only have heard what Mr. Oxtan said!"

"I would sooner hear what *you* said."

"It was so noble of you to acknowledge that you had modified your opinions, and that there were many things on which you differed from the Secretary, and then to make that *résumé* of his services to the colony; such a glorious panegyric. I clasped my hands together with excitement as you went on."

"I live with one object," said Joe; "and you are

worthy to know of it; you are worthy to share my secret. I dread the effects of faction on this colony. This colony must be governed by a great coalition between James Oxtan and Phelim of Ryan, and I am the man to bring that about."

The widow *thought*, "Well, you have a tolerable amount of assurance, if that is any recommendation. Is there anything else you would like?" But she *said* rapturously, "What a magnificent and statesmanlike idea! Oh, the day you bring about that result, I will retire to my *boudoir* and weep for joy!"

"Do *you* wish me success?" exclaimed Joe, seizing her hand in his absence of mind. "Oh! if" —

"Hullo! you people," exclaimed the Secretary, who came up at this moment, "is that the *Sentinel*? Is the list out? Let us look."

Both the widow and Joe got excessively red, but perhaps the Secretary didn't notice it. At all events he did not say anything.

"Only three tolerable people among the lot. Old Lesbia Burke is the best man among them, when all is said and done."

"But what an absurd thing to do; to appoint a woman," bridled the widow. "It is so—so improper."

"It's rather a cool precedent, certainly; but, as for Lesbia, the dear old girl would command a frigate, or

take a regiment into action, if you gave her a month's training."

"Well, she is a kind body, and I wish her well," said the good-natured little widow. Every one had a kind word for Miss Burke.

"Shall you think me a brute," said the Secretary, "if I leave you here with Burton, and step into town to the club and hear the news? I ought to show to-day, or they will think I am crying."

"Oh, do go, my dear creature. Don't, for heaven's sake, let them think you feel it. Mr. Burton and I will sit here and play *eucre*, and abuse the new ministers. We are getting very fond of one another." And so the Secretary went.

## CHAPTER XI.

## TOO LATE ! TOO LATE !

THE widow and Joe had some half-hour's flirtation before the Secretary returned. He had been much less time than they expected, and looked very grave. "Burton," he said, "I want to speak to you."

Joe went into another room with him. "I have heard grave news, I am sorry to say," continued he, "which affects a mutual friend of ours, and, as I have long suspected, a very dear one of your sister's. The Melbourne papers have just come in ; read this."

Joe with dismay read the following :—

"The unfortunate Omeo business is assuming very tragical proportions, and Government will have to take immediate measures to see if any of the poor fellows are still, by any possibility, alive. We said, last week, that provisions were at famine prices, and utterly deficient in quantity ; since then, the miserable diggers have taken the only measure left

“ open to them. They have fled, most of them towards  
“ the Ovens, 160 miles through a nearly unknown and  
“ quite uninhabited country, without provisions. Such  
“ troopers as have been sent out to seek for them have  
“ come back with the most terrible stories. Trooper  
“ O'Reilly found no less than eight dead together on  
“ the Milta Milta in one place. One thing is perfectly  
“ certain ; two hundred famine-stricken wretches  
“ have left the Omeo, and only nine have reached  
“ Beechworth by Snake Valley ; while eleven have  
“ turned up at the Nine Mile Creek on the Sydney  
“ Road. In this most lamentable and unhappy  
“ business, we can blame no one. There was gold  
“ there, for Trooper O'Reilly took 130 ounces from  
“ the bodies of the unfortunates—which bodies, after  
“ securing such papers as would lead to their iden-  
“ tification, he had to leave to the tender mercies of  
“ the eagle-hawks and wild dogs, and all the other  
“ nameless horrors of which it appals us to think.  
“ To the relatives of those men who are known to have  
“ left the lake westwardly, and whose names we give  
“ here, we would say, ‘ If those you love are not among  
“ the twenty men who have come back, give up hope.  
“ We are kind, while we seem cruel. Give up hope.  
“ Those you love are at rest by now.’ ”

Joe looked up with a scared face, for neither Erne's



name nor Tom Williams's name was in the list. He read them through once more in the wild hope that they were there, and he had missed them ; once more to feel to the full the realization of the agony he felt at their absence. We must have a fruition of pain as of pleasure, or we gain no relief. When your child died, sir, why did you go and look into the coffin ?

"I am guilty of this man's blood," he said. "I stand here before you, as the murderer of Erne Hillyar, in the sight of God."

"My good fellow," said the Secretary, "don't be rhetorical. Don't use that inflated style of speech, which may be useful enough in the House ; in common life, it's a bad habit. What on earth do you mean ?"

"I mean every word I say. I wish your taunt was true, but it is not. I know now that my sister Emma loved him, and would have married him, but that she refused to leave me, because my hideous infirmity would render domestic life—I mean married domestic life—an impossibility. She devoted herself to me, and refused him. And he, caring nothing for life, has gone to that miserable God forgotten desert, and has died there. I saw her doing all this, and in my wretched selfishness let her do it, and said not one word. Call me coward, knave, selfish villain,

what you will ; but don't taunt me with rhetorical flourishes. I am Erne Hillyar's murderer."

The Secretary looked exceedingly grave. Seventeen years, passed partly in money-making, and partly in official life, had not deadened the sentimental part of him one bit ; he still hated to inflict pain ; but he had learned to say a hard word, when he thought that word was deserved, and when it did not interfere with any political combination. The sentimental third of his soul was enlisted on Emma's side most entirely since Joe's explanation ; he bore very hard on Joe, and was angry with him.

"You have been much to blame," he said, and would have gone on, but there was a crackling of wheels on the gravel, and he paused. "Keep it from her," he said hurriedly. "This may not be true. Keep the papers from her. They are coming. If it is true, let her hear it from my wife."

They went quickly into the next room to join Mrs. North, and immediately after Mrs. Oxton and Emma came in. Both were changed since we made their acquaintance a few years ago. Mrs. Oxton had faded rapidly, like most Australian beauties, and there was nothing left of the once splendid *ensemble* but the eyes and the teeth ; they were as brilliant as ever ; but her complexion was faded into a sickly yellow, and her

beauty had to take its chance without any assistance from colour, which was a hard trial for it, to which it had somewhat succumbed. Still, she had gained a weary and altogether loveable expression, which was, perhaps, more charming than her old splendid beauty. Emma also was very much changed.

She had always been what some call "young of her age." She had been a long while in developing, but now she had developed into a most magnificent woman. The old, soft, and childish roundness of her face was gone, and out of it there had come, as it were, the ideal of the soul within—gentle, patient—of a soul that had suffered, and would endure. Her look was one of continual and perfect repose; and yet, now that the face was more defined, those who knew her best could see how clearly and decisively the mouth and chin were cut; one could see now, how it was that she could not only endure, but act.

She was tall, but not so tall as her mother. Her carriage was very easy and graceful, though very deliberate.

During her residence in Palmerston she had taken care to watch the best people, and was quite clever enough to copy their manners without caricaturing them, which is being very clever indeed. This evening she was dressed in white crape, with a scarlet opera-

cloak ; her wreath was of dark red Kennedy, and she had a considerable number of diamonds on her bosom, though no other jewels whatever. Altogether she was a most imperial-looking person, and deserved certainly what she had had that night—the attention of the whole theatre.

“I am so sorry you did not go with us, Mrs. North,” she said in her quiet old voice, not altered one bit. “Catherine Hayes has been singing more divinely than ever. My dear brother, you have lost something. Will you come home now?”

“I cannot let you go till you have had supper, my love,” put in Mrs. Oxton ; and Emma willingly assented, and talked pleasantly about the opera, until they came into the light of the dining-room. After she had seen Joe’s face she was quite silent.

They drove home, and the instant they were alone in their house she spoke. “My own brother, I have not spelt at your face for so many years without being able to read it ; but there is a look in it to-night which I have never seen there before. Something terrible has happened.”

Joe remained silent.

“Is Erne dead?”

Joe tried to speak, but only burst into tears.

“I can bear it, dear, if you tell me quickly—at least,

I think I can bear it, or I will try, God help me ! Only tell me quickly."

"There is no certainty. There is a list published, and his name is not there. That is all."

"Have you got the paper ?"

"Yes."

"I must see it, or I shall die. I must know the worst, or I shall die. I must see that paper."

Joseph was forced to give it to her, and she read it quickly through. Then she sat down on a chair, and began rocking her body to and fro. Once, after a long time, she turned a face on Joseph which frightened him, and said, "Eagle-hawks and wild dogs," but she resumed her rocking to and fro once more. At last she said, "Go to bed, dear, and leave me alone with God." And to bed he went; and, as he saw her last, she was still sitting there, with her bouquet and her fan in her lap, and the diamonds on her bosom flashing to and fro before the fire, but tearless and silent.

She in her white crape and diamonds, and Erne lying solitary in the bush, with the eagle-hawks and wild dogs riving and tearing at his corpse. It had come to this, then !

Why had Joe brought away the old sampler he had found in the great room at Chelsea, the sampler of the poor Hillyar girl, and hung it up over the fire-place in

the drawing-room? What strange, unconscious cruelty! In her solitary, agonized walking to and fro on that miserable night, never impatient or wild, but ah! so weary; that old sampler was before her, and her tearless eyes kept fixing themselves upon it, till the words, at first mere shreds of faded worsted, began to have a meaning for her which they never had before. That poor crippled Hillyar girl, she thought, had stitched those words on the canvas two hundred years ago, that they might hang before her on this terrible night; before her who might have borne the dear name of Hillyar, but who had driven her kinsman to his death by her obstinacy; words placed there by her crippled brother, for whose sake she had refused this gallant young Hillyar, who had wooed her so faithfully and so truly.

"Why were the Hillyars and the Burtons ever allowed to meet," she asked herself, "if nothing but misery is to come of their meeting? He said once, when we were children, that our house was an unlucky one to the Hillyars. He spoke truth, dear saint. Let me go to him—let me go to him!"

So her diamonds went flashing to and fro before the fire, till the fire grew dim, till the ashes grew dead and cold, and the centipedes, coming back from under the fender to seek for the logs which had been their homes, found them burnt up and gone, and rowed themselves

into crannies in the brickwork, to wait for better times.

Yet as the morn grew chill she sat, with her diamonds, and her fan, and her bouquet ; with the old sampler over the chimney-piece before her ; reading it aloud—

“ Weep not, sweet friends, my early doom,  
Lay not fresh flowers upon my tomb ;  
But elder sour and briony,  
And yew-bough broken from the tree.”

“ Let me go to him ! Dead—alone in the bush, with the eagle-hawks and wild dogs ! Let me go to him ! ”

## CHAPTER XII.

## HUSBAND AND WIFE.

ALL this time there was a Sir George Hillyar somewhere. But where? That is a question which will never be answered with any accuracy, even were it worth answering. What an utterly dissipated and utterly desperate man does with himself in London I do not know; at least, I am unacquainted with the details, and, even were I not, I should hesitate to write them down. No decent house would allow my book to lie on the drawing-room table if I dared to put in a tale what one reads every day in the police reports of the newspapers.

One thing Mr. Compton found out very easily: all his letters bore the London post-mark. Mr. Compton could not make it out. Why did he not come home? Why did he not show? Was he a defaulter, or had he made another engagement, and didn't dare to face his



wife? The old man suspected the latter was the case, and there is every reason to believe that he was right.

Reuben saw Sir George sometimes ; but he never told any one. Their appointments were always made at Chelsea. Reuben found that Sir George's practice of creeping into the old house had become habitual, and he taxed him with it ; and so by degrees he discovered this—that Sir George, knowing it to be one of Samuel Burton's former haunts, had conceived an idea that he would somehow or another return there. This notion, originally well founded, seemed to have grown into a craze with the unhappy man, from certain words which occasionally escaped him. Reuben came to the conclusion that he waited there with a view to murdering him, should he appear. He therefore held his tongue on the fact, so well known to him, that Samuel Burton was safe in Australia—the more, as Sir George never permitted him on any account whatever to share his vigil.

Enough about Sir George Hillyar for the present. I am almost sorry I ever undertook to tell such a story as the history of his life. I suppose that, even in a novel, telling the bare and honest truth must do good somehow ; but at times the task felt very loathsome. I had some faint pleasure in writing about the miserable man

as long as there was some element of hope in his history ; but I sicken at the task now. Knowing the man and his history, I knew what my task would be from the beginning. I undertook it, and must go on with it. The only liberties I have taken with fact have been to elevate his rank somewhat, and to dwell with any eager kindness on such better points as I saw in him. But writing the life of a thoroughly ill-conditioned man, from first to last, is weary work.

But his story sets one thinking—thinking on the old, old subject of how far a man's character is influenced by education ; which is *rather* a wide one. Suppose George Hillyar had been sent to Laleham instead of to Mr. Easy's, would the Doctor have done anything with him ?

I declare, (*à propos des bottles*, if you will,) that there is a certain sort of boy with a nature so low, so sensual, so selfish, so surrounded with a case-hardened shell of impenetrable blockishness ; that if you try to pierce this armour of his, and draw one drop of noble blood from the body which one supposes must exist within, you lose your temper and your time, and get frantic in the attempt. I don't say that these boys all go to the bad ; but in an educational point of view they are very aggravating. If you miss them from the Sunday-school and want to see anything more of them, you will find

them in Feltham Reformatory: though among the upper classes the future of these boys is sometimes very different. "Now this vice's dagger has become a squire. Now he hath land and beeves."

I do not say that George Hillyar had been one of the lowest of that kind of boy; that he was not, makes the only interest in his history. But we have nearly done with him. It will be a somewhat pleasanter task to follow once more the fortunes of his quaint little wife, and see what an extraordinary prank she took it into her head to play; and to what odd consequences that prank led.

As soon as the summer came on, and the gardeners had filled the great bare parterres all round the house with geraniums, calceolarias, lobelias, and what not; then Gerty took revenge for her winter's imprisonment, and was abroad in the garden and the woods, or on the lake, nearly all day. About this time also she began Baby's education, and had lessons every morning for about five or six minutes. At this time also Mrs. Oxtan began to notice to her husband that Gerty's letters were getting uncommonly silly.

"Let me look at one," said the Secretary, from his easy chair.

When he read it his brow grew clouded. "She never was so silly as this before, was she, my love?"

"Never. And why this long silence about George? He is neglecting her. I wish she was here."

"So do I, by Jove! But she seems pretty happy, too. I can't make it out."

Old Sir George had got the works of that great clock called Stanlake into such perfect order that, once wind it up, and it would go till the works wore out. The servants were so old and so perfectly drilled that really Gerty had but little to do. Her rambles never extended beyond the estate, but were always made with immense energy, for some very trivial object. At first it was the cowlslips, and then Reuben taught the boy the art of birds'-nesting, and the boy taught his mother; and so nothing would suit her but she must string eggs. However, as the summer went on, she got far less flighty. And the Secretary and his wife noticed the change in her letters, and were more easy about her.

The next winter passed in the same total seclusion as the last. Mr. Compton saw a little change for the worse in her towards the end of it. He now gathered from her conversation that she had somehow got the impression that George was gone away with Mrs. Nalder. He elicited this one day after that affectionate woman had, hearing for the first time Gerty was alone, come raging over to see her. Gerty told him that she thought it rather bold on the part of that brazen-faced creature

to come and ring at the door in a brougham, and ask if she was dead, after taking away her husband from her. She did not seem angry or jealous in the least. Mr. Compton did not know, as we do, that her suspicions of Mrs. Nalder were only the product of a weak brain in a morbid state: if he had, he would have been more disturbed. But, assuming the accusation to be true, he did not half like the quiet way in which she took it. "She will become silly, if she don't mind," he said.

The summer went on, and Gerty went on in the same manner as she had done in the last. It happened that on the 17th of August Mr Compton went and stayed with her at Stanlake, and settled a little business, to which she seemed singularly inattentive. Nay, she seemed incapable of attention. She talked to him about a book she had taken a great fancy to, "White's History of Selborne," which Reuben had introduced to the boy, and the boy to his mother; indeed, all her new impressions now came through her boy. She told him about the migration of the swallows,—how that the swifts all went to a day, were all gone by the 20th of August. Some said they went south; but some said they took their young and went under water with them, to wait till the cold, cruel winter was over, and the sun shone out once more.

This conversation made Mr. Compton very anxious.

He thought she was getting very flighty, and wondered how it would end. He thought her eye was unsettled. On the evening of the 21st of August the Stanlake butler came to him, called him out from dinner, and told him that her ladyship and the young gentleman had been missing for twenty-four hours.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## GERTY'S ANABASIS.

THE first thing Mr. Compton did, on hearing of Lady Hillyar's disappearance, was to take a cab and dash off to the Nalders' in Grosvenor Place, in the wild hope that Mrs. Nalder *might* know something about Sir George Hillyar's whereabouts, and that she might enable him to communicate personally with him. The house was blazing with lights, and the carriages were flashing rapidly up to the door; but kind Nalder came down to him. Seeing no one but a gentle and mild-looking old gentleman before him, he ventured to talk his native language, which he would not have ventured to do for his life in his own drawing-room, and explained to Mr. Compton that Mrs. N. had got on a tarnation tall hop—a regular Old Tar River breakdown; and, seeing Mr. Compton was in full dress, he hoped his business would keep, and that he would jine 'em and shake a toe. Having relieved his heart by so much of the dear

old prairie talk, and seeing Mr. Compton was anxious and distressed, he began to speak in diplomatic American—absolutely perfect English, slightly Frenchified in style, and spoken a little through the nose; English which, under the present presidency, seems to be going out of fashion, as Webster's English gives way to Lincoln's, and M'Clellan's to Grant's.

He was very much distressed at what Mr. Compton told him. Lady Hillyar's jealousy against Mrs. Nalder, to which he had so delicately alluded, was an old source of distress to him and his wife. As for their having any knowledge whatever of Sir George Hillyar's whereabouts, they had actually none at all; and, if he might speak without giving offence, had no wish for any.

"As for your suspicion of her having drowned herself, my dear sir," Nalder continued, "I would banish that from my mind utterly. What earthly reason can she have for such a proceeding? Pooh, pooh, my dear sir—if you will allow me to speak so to a man so much older than myself—you are fanciful. Because a woman talks about swallows going under water, is she, therefore, necessarily to follow the precedent herself?"

Mr. Compton stood silent for half a minute; before he had time to speak, Mr. Nalder rammed both his hands into the bottom of his breeches' pocket, and said,



in that loud, snarling whine which it has pleased the Americans to adopt in moments of emergency—

“I’ll tell you whawt, lawyer : I’ll bet New York against New Orleans, or Chicago against Kingston, that she has bolted to Australey, back to her sister.”

So she had. But, first of all, Mr. Compton insisted on believing that she had drowned herself—in consequence of that unlucky remark of hers about the swallows. Next, he insisted that she could never have started for Australia without telling him, which was equally nonsensical. Thirdly, he advanced the theory that she hadn’t got any money, quite forgetting that George had allowed her a privy purse of 400*l.* a year ; of which she probably hadn’t spent 100*l.* And, lastly, just when he had determined to make strict inquiries about the London Docks, Gerty was quietly arranging her cabin on board the *Baroda* at Southampton.

She would not face another winter ; she had wit left to see that her wits were going, and that it would be wiser to put herself under the protection of the Oxtons. She was also uncertain of her position. She could not tell whether any of them would prevent her, or whether they had the right ; so she determined to have no argument about the matter. One evening after dark, taking no more with her than she could carry, she managed, sometimes carrying Baby and sometimes letting him

walk, to get across country to a station on the main line of the South Western, where she was not known, in time for the last train, and by it went on straight to Southampton. The next morning she quietly bought her luggage, and moved to another hotel to avoid attention. In a week the good ship went thundering out between the Shingles and the Needles; and when the great chalk wall was passed, and Alum Bay was only a wonderful recollection, Gerty felt that she was free.

She had taken passage only two days before the ship sailed, and had sense enough to use her own name, considering that fewer liberties would be taken with Lady Hillyar than with Mrs. Hillyar. She sat next the captain at dinner, and seldom spoke to any one else. Now she had got among other people once more, she found how nervous, timid, and hesitating these two years of seclusion had made her. She was afraid to speak for fear of saying some unutterable nonsense.

At Alexandria some more Australians joined them, making the whole number up to nine; but they were lost among the Indians. And such of the Australians who did know anything of her, only said that old Neville's daughter was giving herself airs since she had married a title; and so, after the Australians got into their own steamer at Point de Galle, and were alone

together, none of them troubled themselves about the little fine lady of Cooksland.

Gerty had been accustomed to consider Melbourne a low sort of place, where the shopkeepers were admitted into society, and you never knew whom you might meet ; but when, between Sandridge and Emerald Hill, she came on the first clump of gum-trees, with bracken fern growing beneath them, she loved it, and would love it for ever. It might be a low, upstart place, fifty years younger than Sydney, full of all sorts of people, nurse of all sorts of dangerous opinions ; but it was Australia still. Wapping is not a nice place—nay, it is a very nasty place indeed ; but one will love it because it is sometimes the first place that one puts one's foot on in England. It was not very difficult for Gerty to fall in love with dear old Melbourne, in spite of her having been trained by that veritable old squatter, her father, to consider it the City of Satan.

The passenger-list in the *Argus* announced the arrival of Lady Hillyar, and, moreover, that she was at the "Prince of Wales." Lady H—— drove over in a few days from Toorak to call on her, but she was gone. She had dismissed her maid, and hired an open car as far as Albury, leaving most of her luggage behind.

Lady H—— thought it very strange that Lady Hillyar had not gone by steamer to Sydney, and from thence,

by New Caledonia, New Zealand, Queensland (then called Moreton Bay), New Hungary, New United Italy, New Poland, New Tartary, New Wapping, and New Beloochistan, on to Cooksland. But, supposing that Lady Hillyar was tired of the sea, she was not so much surprised after all at her going overland; for the distance between Albury and Cooksland was not so very great. Only a very small strip of New South Wales interposed.

Every schoolboy knows, or, according to the latest critical formula, would be flogged for not knowing, that Albury is on the River Murray, and is the last town in the republic of Victoria, and that across the river you come into New South Wales. But every schoolboy does not know, inasmuch as no one but myself is in possession of the fact, that by holding to a native path through the bush from that place, in a direction north-eastern by south, you reach the frontier of Cooksland, by stout walking, within three days. Since the two-and-sixpenny duty on gold, this track has been much used by smugglers; and, if the Victorian Government will take advice, they will look to the matter. In the good time coming, when the Australian Federation set up on their own account, and, sickened with prosperity, feel the necessity of a little fighting, they need not despair of finding a *casus belli* among themselves. The

difference of intercolonial tariffs will make as handsome a cause for a very pretty squabble as the devil himself could desire. "General Peter Lalor crossed the Murray yesterday, and attacked the enemy's earthworks at Three Mile Creek. He was forced to retire with a loss of 400 men. The Sydney-siders' loss is considered by him to have been far greater." How pretty that will read ! But we have read some queerer things than that lately from America.

But Gerty ? she discharged her car at Albury, paying the man forty-five pounds. She had made her resolution ; she had determined to *walk* across into Cooksland.

The Bush had no more terrors for her than Regent Street has for you. If she met a bush hand, and her honour was in question, why she had provided herself with a revolver. It was mentioned months ago that one of the two great recollections of her life was first being taken to a ball at Sydney ; and another was hinted at only, as we intended to reserve it for this place. One summer's day, when she was a child, after she and Aggy had been gathering quantongs by the creek, her father, old Mr. Morton, Mr. Dawson, and young Clayton, had come suddenly home, said something which frightened their mother out of her wits, had barricaded the door, and loaded their guns. Soon after they began shooting at some men outside, and the

men shot at them through the windows, and broke the claret jug on the sideboard. She remembered that these men, the bushrangers, had broken in the door, and that Mr. Dawson had shot down two of them, and killed another by bending his head back, and that her mother had kissed Mr. Dawson afterwards—that she had been sorry for the poor men, as she was for the inhabitants of Jericho, who had not shot into any one's windows, or at least it wasn't mentioned—that her mother was very angry with her, and said that a girl who hadn't gumption enough to drive a knife into a bushranger's heart would not have the courage to drive it into her own, and was unfit to live. Gerty had learnt from her mother how to defend her honour.

How quaint that old Australian life seems to one! High refinement in many cases, but the devil always at the door. Not, as in India, a sudden, furious, unexpected devil, tearing all to pieces; but a recognised devil, standing always ready. "This is the last of that seal of Lafitte, sir, and the blacks are crowding round and looking awkward." "*The Illustrated News* is come, sir, but no *Spectator* this mail, and Mike Howe is out again, sir, and has stuck up Dolloy's, and burnt one of the children, sir. Do you think he will take us next, or the Macdonalds?" Those are the sort of little mares-tails you get at the outside edge of that vast cloud of

English influence which has now overshadowed fully one-sixth of the human race. And until you have been to the edge, you will find it difficult fully to appreciate the extreme meteoric disturbance which you will find there. Look at the case of a certain family the other day in Queensland—refined, hospitable people, beloved by every one—the young squire, sent over to Rugby, where he turned out champion cricketer. They all got suddenly, ruthlessly murdered by the blacks one summer's evening.

Were there any blacks on Gerty's track? Plenty. Was she alarmed about them? Not the least in the world. There were none but *tame* blacks on that line of country; there was not a wild black within a hundred miles—they had all been tamed ever so long. And the process? Borrow Chief Justice Therry's book, and read pages 271 to 278, and see if you can sleep after it.

Gerty did not care for the blacks one halfpenny. She rather looked forward to meeting some of them, to have a good "patter" with them, and see if she had that extraordinary comical patois for which she was once famous—the Romany of Australia—the dialect used by the two races in communicating with one another; nearly all English, but which is made so wonderfully funny by the absence of all declension and conjugation

in the native language, and which forces the adept to use only the first person singular (or rather the native substitute for it, "mine"), and the third; and confines him mostly to the present tense.\* Gerty was anxious to see if she had forgotten her Blackfellow.

Starting from Albury, she came at once into Rabelais county, where she lay one night at the house of Count Raminagrobis, an aged French squatter, who told her fortune in four different ways, each of which came different. She got into Hawthorne county next morning, and spent the night with Mrs. Prynne and her charming *espiègle* daughter from New England. After this she passed through the great Grevillia scrub, where she left part of her gown and her few remaining wits, and, crossing the river Roebuck, came into Cooksland, in Jones county, and passed the night at Blogg's station, on the Flour Bag Creek; delighted to find herself once more with more familiar and less queer people, in the land of her birth.

She determined to make for the Barkers' station, that being the nearest where she was known; and three glorious spring days she spent in getting there—three days passed in introducing Baby to the flowers, the

\* *English*. "I saw a large number of horses beside the creek."  
*Blackfellow*. "Mine make a light eighty-four (generally, I regret to say, adjective) horses along a creek." *English*. "I do not think it was he." *Blackfellow*. "Baal mine think it that one."



animals, and the birds. The third evening, just at dark, she stood on the summit of Cape Wilberforce, and could see the lights of the town below her on the other side of the Erskine. There was a large light about two miles to the left—the light, in fact, of the new copper works; but between her and the river there was only one solitary light, about a mile below her, towards which she determined to make, to ask the way across the river; for she knew she must cross the river and pass right through the township before she could reach the Barkers, even if that were possible to-night.

So she picked her way down in the dark, carrying Baby pickaback, until she came to some rails, over which they got, and came into a thicket of wood, a very dark place undergrown with shrubs. They had lost the light now, but very soon came suddenly upon it again close to them; at which moment a large dog came out at them and began barking furiously.

“Don’t be frightened, love,” said Gerty to Baby; “it is only a sheep-dog; he won’t hurt us.” To the dog—“*You’ll* catch it, sir. I’ll give it to you, sir, and so I tell you. How dare you? Come here, sir; do you hear, come here this instant, and don’t let me hear another word out of your head.”

The dog came wagging his tail, and Gerty took him by the scruff of his neck and slapped him. “If you

are in earnest with them, dear," she said, with that careful attention to the child's education which she had always shown, "you should have a tea-stick, and take them by the tail, raising their hind legs off the ground, so that they can't bite you, and lay on like old gooseberry. Now, dear, I will hold him ; do you go into the hut, and say that Lady Hillyar is outside and wishes to be guided to Mr. Barker's. Come, that's a man."

Baby was very valiant. Gerty saw him advance boldly to the door, which was ajar, push it open, and pass on into the well-lit room beyond.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## SAMUEL BURTON GETS A FRIGHT.

SAMUEL BURTON was prospering amazingly. In addition to the plunder which he had netted from his dexterous robberies at Stanlake, he had made a great hit just latterly. He had bought a lot of twenty acres, with frontage, on the Erskine, for 200*l.*, and now the Burnt Hut Copper Mining Company had, after a long wrangle, consented to pay him 2,300*l.* for it, that they might build the terminus to their tramway thereon.

Yet he was far from being more easy in his mind than heretofore. Had any one told the miserable desperate hound, who had sneaked into George Hillyar's office so few years ago, and borrowed thirty pounds of him, that he would have risen to such a height of prosperity, he would have laughed at him. But here he was, not only comfortable for life, but holding over Sir George Hillyar a power worth thousands a year to him : and yet he was getting desperate and ferocious.

He was a most awful scoundrel. There could be no doubt of that. It may be true that there is an average amount of crime to be committed in a certain number of years, and therefore it don't much matter how it is done or who does it, as a contemporary wittily put it the other day ; yet still, if you would carry Buckleism to this extreme length, you will find that the little efforts after good, and the better instincts of the very worst men, are very well worth careful examination.

Now this utter scoundrel, Burton, for instance, had his good instincts. The man was good-natured and fond of children. He was grateful and generous, and, what is more to the purpose just now, his devotion to his supposed son Reuben was a passion with him. Sir George Hillyar had used him and abused him for his own ends, but he had retained a kind of dog-like faithfulness towards that man, until he had stepped in between him and Reuben ; and now, moping in solitude, or worse than solitude, his old liking for Sir George was rapidly giving way to ferocious hatred. He felt sure, and he was right, that no one but Sir George Hillyar—who, as he knew, hated and distrusted him—could have stepped in between honest kindly Reuben and himself, and produced this estrangement.

His most affectionate appeals to Reuben had been left long unanswered, and now were only answered by

letters shorter and colder time after time. Reuben had cared for him once, and risked all for him ; and the poor wretch, who had tried what *he* called religion, and had found that the lowest and wildest form of it enjoined a practice far, far beyond what was possible to him now ; felt more and more every day, as his wasted life drew towards its close, the want of some one being who could care for him. Reuben would have cared for him, and tended him, and seen him kindly to the dark dreadful threshold, which, as he fully believed, was the threshold of everlasting torment. Hell, since his last feeble effort at reformation, he considered as certain ; but there had been something left in this world ; there had been Reuben's kind pleasant ministrations to the very end. Sir George, whom he had served so faithfully for good or evil, had stepped in, and taken this away.

In his lonely despair, he vowed a terrible vengeance. It was easy vowing ; but how was he to execute it ? A few months ago he might, as he thought, have struck the blow, by placing the will in Erne's hands, just at the time when Erne had been so kind to him ; but, partly from some lingering reluctance to ruin his old master, partly from natural indecision, and partly from a sneaking miser-like love of possessing unused power, he had hesitated. And now Erne was

gone South to die; nay, rumours had come that he was dead; and what was his precious will worth then?

And there was another thing which terrified the poor wretch night and day. He was *afraid* of Sir George Hillyar, *physically* afraid. Give him a knife, and give any other man a cudgel, and he would face it out. In that case he had the courage of experience. But Sir George Hillyar was a bold man, the pupils of whose eyes would fix themselves steadily when he looked at you, and which pupils would suddenly dilate, just before the snarl and the blow came together, as the thunder snap and the lightning did, when the storm was directly overhead. And he was an unscrupulous man too; so, sometimes, Samuel Burton would wake in the night in a perspiration of fear, and think that he heard George Hillyar moving towards him in the dark to murder him.

He would not sleep alone. But he had no friend in Romilly. He was known for a convict, and, although they treated him with civility, nay, with more than civility, they would have none of him. Tim Reilly, the (I was going to say, horse-stealer, but won't)—would have nothing at all to do with him. Tim had, like his great compatriot, O'Connell, driven a vast number of coaches and four through, at all events,

one Act of Parliament—that against horse-stealing. Dan O'Connell had driven, or was prepared to drive, through the whole lot of them. He beat Tim O'Reilly in this respect, but Tim beat him in another ; Tim always stole the horses before he got on the box. But Tim had never been convicted, and would not lower himself by consorting with Samuel Burton.

It was mentioned before in these pages that, when Samuel first invaded Cooksland, old Barker found him an old convict shepherd, with a view to confining the criminal contamination within one single hut. Samuel Burton now, for want of another, got this old man to come and live with him ; and I need not say that, the longer he lived there, the more pleasant the old jail-slang became to him, and the more surely every spark of good in him got trampled out.

Still there were times, even now, when he would get ashamed of his life with this ribald old sinner, and think of the life he might lead with Reuben, as of something higher and purer, getting further and further from him every day.

One night they were sitting before the fire talking together.—Bah ! let us go to Tennyson—

“ Fear not thou to loose thy tongue,  
Set thy hoary fancies free ;  
What is loathsome to the young,  
Savours well to thee and me.

Chaunt me now some wicked stave,  
Till thy drooping spirits rise,  
And the glowworm of the grave  
Glimmer in thy rheumy eyes."

Let us leave the conversation of two depraved old men alone. They were talking on together, each chuckle getting more fiendish than the last one, when the elder rose up and started back, with a frightful and savage oath ; and Samuel Burton staggered trembling against the wall, and leant there, with his face worked into an abject expression of the extremest terror.

For there stood between them a most beautiful child, with light waving hair like an angel's, dressed all in white. It stood full in the firelight, and its little hands were spread towards the blazing logs, as if in prayer.



## CHAPTER XV.

## SAMUEL BURTON'S RESOLUTION.

THEN the man who had savagely cursed this beautiful and holy apparition as something godlike, and therefore utterly abhorrent to his nature—this man relapsed into moody, defiant silence: but the man who had only trembled before it, the man who could still feel terrified and abashed at the contrast between his own black soul and the sacred purity of the child before him—this man gained courage to advance towards it, and to speak tenderly and kindly to it.

Little George had knelt before the fire, and was eagerly warming his hands, for the night was chill. Still the fancy held with Samuel Burton that the child was kneeling before a blazing altar, and praying for him.

"My dear," he said, "have you lost your way in the wood, and shall I take you home?"

"Mamma lost her way, and when the dog came out she beat it. Not so hard as Reuben beats the setters though, for it did not cry out."

"Who is Mamma, dear, and where is she?"

"I am cold, and I think I have wet my right foot in the wood. I want to warm my hands, and then I will remember the message and go back to her. She won't mind waiting while I warm my hands."

"Who is Mamma, dear? And you can remember the message while you warm your hands," said Samuel, with increasing interest.

"Oh, yes," said Baby, "I can remember. Mamma is Lady Hillyar. She is outside now, and she wants some one to take her up to Mr. Barker's."

"My dear," said Samuel Burton, eagerly kneeling beside the child, "do you know Reuben?"

"You silly man," laughed Baby; "of course I do."

"Where is Reuben, dear?"

"At Stanlake, of course. I must go back to Mamma."


"One word, dearest. Where is papa?"

"Papa is in Italy."

"Does papa never come to Stanlake? Does papa never see Reuben?"

"No, never. He never comes to Stanlake. I must go to Mamma, please; take me to Mamma."

Samuel had heard enough. He seized a candle, and



rushed out of the hut, exclaiming aloud, with suddenly assumed excitement,

"Good heavens! Her ladyship alone in the bush, and the dew falling. Madam! My lady! For God's sake answer! Where is your ladyship? Oh dear dear me!"

"Here I am," replied Gerty complacently, coming out of the darkness with the sheep-dog leaping upon her; "I was wondering what was keeping the dear child so long."

"Dear! dear! your ladyship will have caught your death of cold. Pray walk in to the fire. Allow me as an old bushman to caution your ladyship against these October dews; though indeed, my lady, you should know the climate as well as I. I suppose Sir George has gone on to Mr. Barker's."

"Sir George is in Europe," answered Gerty. "But I wish you would take me up to Mr. Barker's, for I am tired, and they will be gone to bed. Hallo!" she continued, turning to the older convict, "why there's old Ben! I thought you were shepherding for Mr. Barker. I aint going to have *your* company up there, you know, and so I don't deceive you."

The old wretch gave a grin and a growl, but Gerty turned away from him with calm contempt.

"I beg your ladyship's pardon," said Samuel, "but it

is a good five miles to the station, and it would be almost too much for you to-night."

"I aint going to stop here, you know," said Gerty.  
"Likely indeed!"

"But could not your ladyship go to the Burtons for to-night? It is close by."

"You don't mean to tell me that they are here still. Why I thought they had found a mine and gone."

"They are living within two hundred yards, my lady. Only across the water. Will you follow me?"

She went out after him into the night air, and felt it strike deadly chill upon her. She thought of what Samuel had said about the heavy October dews, and thought she must have caught cold. She could scarcely follow Samuel, though he walked close before her. Baby had hold of her skirts, but she felt about in the darkness till she got his hand, and said: "It is only two hundred yards, dear, and we shall be among the Burtons. Thank God, it did not happen sooner."

They crossed a wooden bridge, and came into the street of the town, the lights of which were dim in Gerty's failing eyes. Somehow, immediately after she was in a pretty drawing-room, and a group of people, who had hurriedly risen, were pressing towards her.

But she only saw Emma Burton, and she cried out to her, "Emma, dear, I am going to be ill; take care

of Baby." Then there came over her in one moment a terrible recollection of her lone, solitary journey ; a sudden appreciation of the enormous task she had so heedlessly undertaken ; then one happy moment, in which she was conscious that she was safe ; and then the brave, silly little woman, overdone in body and mind, became comfortably insensible, and was borne in a kind of triumph to bed by Mrs. Burton and Emma, and, waking up, found that she had caught a violent rheumatic cold, lost one of her shoes, and all capacity for thinking consecutively and reasonably.

She had trusted her old friend the Bush a little too far this time. As she very sensibly said, she was glad it did not happen before.

Samuel Burton went back to his cottage very fast. When he got back he found old Ben still smoking over the fire, who seemed inclined to resume the conversation where it was broken off ; but Samuel told him savagely to shut up, and sat over the fire with his head buried in his hands.

So Reuben was alone at Stanlake. Now or never was his time. He determined to go to England to see Reuben. Reuben's mind had been poisoned against him by some one ; perhaps by old Morton, the keeper. He would find Reuben, and make his story good to him, and would induce Reuben to live with him, and

would work to make his fortune. He thought that he had possibly been unjustly suspicious of Sir George Hillyar. He was determined that Sir George Hillyar should have fair play. He would not meddle with Sir George in any way.

Meanwhile, with regard to Samuel Burton. If the child, when stretching out its hands towards the burning logs, had really been praying for mercy for his father, he could hardly have done more than he had to soften the heart of the man who held such terrible power over both of them. If he could only get Reuben, he would not behave vindictively towards Sir George. Nay, supposing Erne to be really dead, what power had he? And this too is remarkable. He could not decide whether Erne was dead or alive; for at one time he thought it impossible that he could have survived, which was perfectly reasonable; and, at another, his soul was filled with a superstitious, unreasonable belief that he was alive, and would return. He had divorced himself by instinct and practice from truth so long that he was utterly unable to examine evidence, and decide on probabilities. But he found that, whenever he believed Erne to be alive, his rancour against Sir George Hillyar increased, and, when he believed him dead, his feeling towards his old master grew more tender. As his intellect told him that his power of treating with

his enemy grew less, so his heart grew more tender towards the enemy with whom he was about to treat. I suppose we should all feel somewhat in love with the Russians, and feel a deep admiration for their valour, their—(I don't know what else there is to admire in them, but we could find that out)—in case of our falling out with the Americans. When we found ourselves not in a position to fight them we should begin to feel affectionate towards them, and remember old Crimean courtesies, nay, contrast them, the Russians, favourably with our faithful allies the French. Now that Samuel Burton saw the power over his old master slipping through his hands, he began to care for him once more.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## EX-SECRETARY OXTON GETS A LESSON.

"You must do me the credit to say, dear Mr. Oxton," said the widow North, one evening at the Bend, "that I always hated Mr. O'Ryan most cordially. But I never believed him to be a fool—yes, I will say it, a fool—till now."

"You are quite sure he is one, then?" said Mr. Oxton.

"Don't you think so yourself?" said the widow.

"No, I don't," said the Secretary. "I always thought him wonderfully clever and able, but I never thought he would have made a statesman till now. No, I won't abuse the word 'statesman.' I never suspected that he had half as much political sagacity as he is showing."

"I am at a loss to understand you," said the widow.

"And I am not in a position to explain myself," said Mr. Oxton, rising and laughing.

"You are very unkind and disagreeable," said the



good-natured widow. "Aggy, don't you think that a simple mistake about the direction of a letter, could have been got over without your husband's having an hour's *tête-à-tête* with Miss Burke?"

"My dear Mary," said Mrs. Oxtan, "you are perfectly right. My husband's *penchant* for Miss Burke has caused me the deepest grief and anxiety for many years. It is a painful subject. Let us change the conversation."

"Well," said Mrs. North, laughing, "I won't try to sow dissension between man and wife, particularly as she is coming here to-night. I hate scenes."

"She will hardly come to-night, in this thunder-storm, will she?" said Joe. "How terrible the rain is!"

"Why, no; she cannot move in such weather as this," Mrs. Oxtan allowed, and they all agreed.

But presently, just after a blinding flash of lightning, her voice was heard in the hall; and they all crowded out to meet her.

She had got on a mackintosh, and had tied a shawl over her bonnet so as completely to hide her face. She looked much more like a man than a woman on the whole, as she stood in the hall, with the wet pouring off her in streams; they only knew it was her by her voice.

"How could you venture out in such weather, my dear Lesbia?" began Mrs. Oxtan.

"Mr. Burton, your sister's come by the stamer; but she's not gone home; she is up at my house, and stays there to-night. James Oxton, I'll trouble ye for an audience in a hurry, alone wid yourself."

Mr. Oxton took her into another room, and left the others wondering. The moment they were alone, and she had moved the shawl from her head, Mr. Oxton saw she looked exceedingly grave.

"James, you may well wonder at my coming out such weather. I have got news which will make you look as grave as me."

"I know you have been doing something kind for me, old friend; I am sure of that."

"Nothing more than coming out in a thunder-storm, and I'd do more than that for ye. It's some one else ye're obliged to this time, my dear James. That Emma Burton, who is not only ready and willing to devote her life and her health to any one who may need it, but by some divine kind of luck seems always in the way to do it—it's her you're obliged to this time."

"God bless her beautiful face, and soften her sorrow! I need not pray that she may have peace, for she has that peace which passes understanding. Now, old friend?"

"James, that scoundrel, Sir George Hillyar, has been neglecting Gerty."

"So I supposed, from having none of my letters answered, and from Gerty saying nothing of him."

"But it is worse than that."

"Has he gone off with another woman?"

"Yes."

"I did all I could to prevent it," said poor Mr. Oxtan. "What could I do more? He was a very good *parti* for her. How can any one blame me in this miserable business? No! no! I will not say that. I have been deeply to blame, and it will break my poor little Gerty's heart."

Miss Burke sat down on the floor and began to moan.

"Don't make me a scene, there's a dear old girl; I am not up to it. After I let this miserable marriage take place, I should have kept him here. He might have been saved; who knows? Now, get up, Lesbia; you are getting too old to go on like this."

"Not till you know who he has gone off with!—not till you know who he has gone off with!"

"Who is it, then?" said Mr. Oxtan, turning sharply on her.

"Mary Nalder! Oh, the weary day, Mary Nalder!"

"Get up directly. How dare you?—In this house!—How dare you repeat such a wicked falsehood, Lesbia? How dare you believe it? She, indeed: and that fellow! Get up, instantly, and give me the name of

the scoundrel who dared say such a thing. He shan't wait for Nalder's tender mercies. Get up, and tell me his name."

Miss Burke got up and went to him. "I wouldn't have believed it, James, but that the poor child told me herself not half an hour ago."

"What poor child?"

"Gerty. She has run away, and come by Melbourne, walking, and made her way to the Burtons at Port Romilly. And that saint of a girl has brought her on here, tending her like her own sister, and keeping her quiet."

"Gerty here!"

"Shoeless and worn out. Poor, simple child, she walked three hundred miles through the Bush; and, James—"

"Let me go to her. The scoundrel!—Aggy! Aggy!"

"Be quiet, James," said Miss Burke, rapidly and decisively. "Don't be a fool. The poor child is out of her mind, and don't know any one but Emma Burton. And you must keep Aggy from her, and you must not go near her yourself. For, James; come and hear a dear old friend quietly; the poor little thing's last craze is that you and Aggy are the cause of the whole mischief. Since you have spoken 'about Mary Nalder as roundly as you have, you have entirely restored my

faith in her, and I beg her pardon for having been so wicked as to believe anything against her. But our own Gerty says, in her madness, that it was you and Aggy who introduced Sir George and Mrs. Nalder at your own house, and that she will never endure the sight of either of you again. You must break this to Aggy, and you must leave her to me and to Emma Burton for the present."

So this was the end of this grand marriage, in which the Secretary had been led to acquiesce in an evil moment, disapproving of it in his heart the whole time. Even if he could not have stopped it in the first instance (as he certainly could) he need not, for the mere sake of a few odd thousands a-year, have committed the fatal fault of letting such a wild hawk as George Hillyar go down the wind, out of call, with such a poor little dove as Gerty for his only companion. And now here was Gerty come back, deserted, heart-broken, and mad, cursing him and his wife as the cause of all her misfortunes. And, although the dear little fool was wrong as to particulars, was she not right in the main? Mr. Oxtan was more humbled and saddened than he had been for many years. He had always had a most firm faith in the infallibility of his own sagacity, and this was the first great shock it had ever received; and the blow hit him the harder because it came through his heart.

From this time forward he was less positive and dictatorial, less certain of his own conclusions. The careless Indian who spilt the pot of wourali poison over Humboldt's stocking was nearly depriving us of the "Kosmos;" and so little Gerty, who was as nearly cracked as any one of her extremely limited intellects can manage to be, without the aid of hereditary predisposition, did by her curious Hegira manage to affect the course of affairs to a considerable extent; and that, too, without any accidental or improbable coincidence of time. She not only was the cause of Samuel Burton's going to England after Reuben, but her arrival, in the sad plight which we have described, had the effect on Mr. Oxton mentioned above—made him more distrustful of foregone conclusions, and more open to negotiation.

But now. Mr. Oxton bent his head down on the table and wept. After a time he looked up again, and said, "The last time I cried, Lesbia, was when Charley Morton's father got the Latin verse prize, instead of me, at Harrow." Miss Burke was standing in her dripping mackintosh, with her head bare and her long black hair tangled down over her shoulders: with her back against the door, sentinel against intruders—patient, gentle, nay, almost servile; but with a fierce untamed power in her splendid physique, in her bold black eyes, and in her

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close set mouth ; a true representative of a great nation subdued for three centuries, but never conquered. As Oxton saw that woman in her fantastic dress, with her wild tangled hair, standing against the door, a light seemed to break on him. "She is half a savage," sometimes he said to himself. "But is there a nobler woman in the colony? I have never done these people justice. These Irish *must* have more in them than I have ever given them credit for. I will try to think differently of them ; I am not too old to learn."

## CHAPTER XVII.

## SOMETHING TO DO.

It was well for poor Emma that she had the care of Gerty just now, for she was pretty nearly heart-broken. Night and day there was but one image before her mind's eye—Erne lying dead in the bush alone.

But the noble girl suffered in silence, and it was only her red eyes in the morning which told Joseph that she had been weeping all night long. They did not allude to the subject after that first dreadful evening; but, when three days were gone, she said she thought she would like to go to her brother James; and that the steamer sailed that day. Joseph was glad she should go, for her presence seemed like a reproach to him; and so she went her favourite voyage to her favourite brother.

They met in silence, but his silent embrace told her that he loved her only the more dearly in her sorrow, and she was contented. She begged to sleep at James's



house, because all her brothers were away at school, and she thought she could sleep better if she had the baby. That night, just before she went across to her brother's house, her mother fell upon her bosom and began weeping wildly; but Emma could not speak of it yet—she only kissed her mother in silence.

In the middle of the night she came to James's room in infinite distress. "James, my dear," she said, "I shall go out of my mind, alone, if those native dogs keep howling. There is one of them again. How very, very dreadful."

There was something so terribly suggestive in her noticing the noise of these foul animals in this way, that it frightened James, and made him think too of his poor friend lying—where? and how?

They found out that she brooded on this in silence all day long; for the next day, towards evening, she was sitting alone with her mother, and suddenly said—

"Mother! I suppose that, even if they were to find his body now, I should not recognise it."

"You will know him when you meet him in glory, my darling; among all the ten thousand saints in heaven you'll know him." This was all that weeping Mrs. Burton could find to say from her bursting heart.

For five days she was like this—not idle, nor morose, only very silent. No wild dogs were heard after the

first night; James confided to one or two of the leading young men that, under the circumstances, the native dogs were an annoyance to his sister. They took uncommonly good care that the girl who had nursed Tim Reilly's child through the small-pox should not be unnecessarily reminded that her sweetheart was lying dead in the bush. There was no more music from the dingoes after that.

So she remained for that time, never weeping before the others, speaking very little, and only once or twice about Erne. Several times her brother James begged her to talk to him and ease her heart; but her answer was always the same—"Not yet, dear; not yet." Once he got her to walk out with him; but one of those foul, filthy, cruel, beautiful eagles came rushing through the forest like a whirlwind just over their heads, and she shut her eyes and stopped her ears, and begged James, for the love of God, to take her home again.

But on the fifth day God sent her relief, and all was well. He sent her work, and her eye grew clear and calm once more, and the deadly lethargy of grief was gone, never to return. The grief was there still; that never could depart any more until death; but God had sent her the only true remedy for it—the remedy which, acting on sainted souls like hers, destroys self, and therefore makes the wildest grief bearable. He sent

her one "whose necessity was greater than her own"—like that of the soldier at Zutphen—and bade her forget herself, and see to this business for Him, and wait for her reward hereafter.

Gerty came to her, broken down in health, and mad, with her silly, crazed little head filled full of groundless suspicions against those who loved her best. Here was work for her with a vengeance. With a feeling of shame at what she chose to call her own selfish grief, she rose and shook it off. When Gerty had been got to bed, she came down to the assembled family, and at one glance they saw that their old Emma was come back to them.

"My dears," she said, "the steamer goes in four days. If I can get her out of that bed I shall take her to Palmerston. As far as her bodily health is concerned, she has only got a bad rheumatic cold. But I shall take her to Palmerston, to Miss Burke. She is not in her right mind exactly, and yet her pulse is quiet, and her eyes are not dilated. She has got a craze about the Oxtons, and—and—She must go to Miss Burke. I can't undertake to do anything without Miss Burke. I shall take her to Palmerston on Thursday."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE BACKSTAIRS HISTORY OF TWO GREAT COALITIONS.

WHEN it was too late, Joseph Burton began to realize to himself the fact that he, by quietly and without remonstrance allowing his sister to devote her life to him, had ruined her life, and had committed a gross act of selfishness. The invalid of the family, among high-bred and high-minded people like the Burtons, is generally nursed and petted into a state of chronic selfishness. Joseph Burton, whose character we have hitherto taken from his brother, had in spite of his really noble instincts, been spoilt in this way, and hitherto had not thoroughly recovered that spoiling. Now he plunged into politics more wildly than ever, and made love to Mrs. North (who was by no means unwilling to have him make love to her : far from it) ; and tried to forget Erne's death and Emma's misery.

Mrs. North's question about the folly of Mr. O'Ryan seemed pertinent enough, but Mr. Oxton's answer

puzzled her exceedingly. Mr. O’Ryan had never concealed his longing for office and power; but, now he had got it, he seemed to be allowing his party to commit such extreme follies, as would put him in the Opposition once more within a twelvemonth. And yet Mr. Oxtan said that he had never before given him credit for any approach to political sagacity. She resolved to get her pretty head as near to Joseph Burton’s handsome one as was proper, in a quiet window, on the first opportunity, and make him explain this mysterious speech of Mr. Oxtan’s.

It wanted explanation, certainly; for, since the foundation of Donnybrook Fair (by King Malachi, or, as Mr. O’Callagan called him, Mellekee, “last of prophets, and first of kings and saints in the Island of Saints,”) seldom have the public affairs of any community been brought into such an extraordinary hurly-burly as that into which the O’Ryan ministry succeeded in bringing the affairs of Cooksland. And yet O’Ryan, who might have whipped his dogs in, and gained the respect of the colony, only laughed, and defended each absurdity by a quaint airy Palmerstonian speech, and let things take their course without the slightest concern.

The colony expected a land bill of him (and to tell the honest truth, a land bill was most imperatively necessary), but none was offered to the house by Mr. O’Ryan. He

left that to his honourable and gallant friend and colleague, Mr. Rory O'More. And, when the provisions of that bill were laid before a paralyzed and awe-stricken House, even Mr. O'Callagan of the *Mohawk*, himself was obliged to confess that it was "a divvle of a bill, indeed, indeed, but, Faug a ballagh, we'll get some piece of it any how."

The chief points in the bill were, that all the waste lands were to be laid open for selection at 5s. an acre; that any person holding over eighty acres should pay a tax of 5s. per acre per annum; and that all the men who at present held more than eighty acres, should pay a tax of 2s. 6d. an acre; which last provision, he remarked, would so far recruit the resources of the colony (they would have taken nearly 3,000*l.* a year from Mr. Oxton alone) as to enable them to reduce import duties, and materially diminish their staff of custom-house officers.

The House wouldn't have this at all—more particularly the gentlemen connected with the Customs (most of them Irish), who happened to sit in the House. The bill was rejected by a perfectly resignable majority; but there was not one single hint of resignation from Mr. O'Ryan. And the quidnuncs of the colony began to remark that neither Mr. Oxton, nor Mr. Dawson, in the Upper House, nor Mr. Dempsey in the Lower, were attending to

their parliamentary duties, though all three were in town.

Mr. Brallagan's new Constitution bill was of a still more astounding nature than Mr. Rory O'More's land bill. It was simply revolutionary. All property qualification was done away with; the Upper House abolished; and every male in the colony of twenty-one, untainted with crime, invested with a vote. Mr. O'Ryan spoke in favour of the bill for about three minutes, with an airy levity which disgusted every one. "You must come to it some day or another; ye'd better swallow it now. Whether the country's fit for it or not, it never will be more fit; besides, I have some sort of curiosity to see the thing at work. If we do go smash with it, the home government can step in; and, if we don't, why we can give the old lady her *congé*, cut the painter, and start for ourselves."

Joseph Burton rose after Mr. O'Ryan, and in a short, stinging speech denounced the insane folly of virtually putting the government of the country into the hands of the most unfortunate and most unthrifty of the old country. "With regard to one half of the emigrants now entering our ports," continued Joe, "I affirm that their mere presence in this colony proves them to be unable to manage their own affairs with any success. The result of conferring full political privileges on a thriftless, selfish,

and idle population would be that the most worthless class would be legislated for, and that the other and more respectable classes, overpowered by numbers, would be neglected ; that government would be forced by the demagogues to divert the revenue to unproductive works to create sham labour, and that there would arise a *lazzaroni* more pestilent than that of Naples."

Not a word did Joe utter against Mr. O'Ryan. The bill was lost by a large majority. One of the younger conservative members rose and gave notice of a motion of want of confidence. The day came and the vote was put ; Mr. O'Ryan was victorious by three votes ; and so public business came to a dead standstill. Only, the governor having politely remarked that he would be glad of a little money on account, they made a House and voted him his salary. As for the rest of the budget, not the slightest effort was made to bring it in ; forcing a budget of any kind through a house, with a majority of three ; which might yet, on any day, in consequence of a hot wind, or the mail steamer coming in, or a steeple chase, or a missionary meeting, or a prize-fight, or a thunderstorm, dwindle to a minority of nine, was too much trouble. Meanwhile affairs were come to a dead lock, and it was notorious that no funds were in hand for the payment of officials for more than two months.

When matters were just at this pass, it so happened



that Mrs. North's pretty little carriage was conveying her quickly down Sturt Street, through the broiling summer noon; when she saw, walking rapidly on the pavement before her, a large white umbrella, with somebody's legs under it; at the sight of which she hailed her coachman, and made him pull up beside the pavement. The radiant face of Joseph Burton looked out from under the umbrella, and the widow perceived that "*ex pede Herculem*"—she had looked in his face so long and so earnestly, that now she could recognise him by the shape of his legs.

He looked so unutterably happy that his joy communicated itself to the kind little widow from the mere force of sympathy, leaving alone and not considering the fact that she was over head and ears in love with him. She was going to speak, when he anticipated her.

"Dear Mrs. North, will you drive me somewhere?"

She was going to say, "I'll drive you anywhere if you will look at me like that!" but she didn't. She only said, "Jump in. Where?"

"The Bend."

"The Bend," cried out Mrs. North to the coachman. And away went "*Lothario*"—second-best trotter in the colony—like a steam-engine.

"What makes you look like this?" said Mrs. North, laying her hand on his arm; "have you good news?"

"News which has brought me to life, and made a man of me once more," said Joe. "I have carefully concealed it from you, my dear friend ; but I have been in deep distress lately, and the cause of that distress is suddenly removed, and I could sing for joy."

Now Mrs. North was one of the most excellent and admirable little women alive. But she had got to love Joe, and she knew that Joe loved her. She also knew well Joe's ultra-sensitiveness about his deformity, and was well aware that he, with his intense pride, would never lay himself open to the chance of a refusal, would never speak until he knew he was safe ; therefore she saw that she would have to do a great deal of a certain sort of work herself, which is generally, by old custom and tradition, done by the gentleman, and yet do it in a way which should not in the slightest degree clash with Joe's exceedingly unpractical and book-gathered notions of womanly modesty.

And, if any one was to ask my opinion, I don't think the little woman was in the least to blame. One would not care to see it done by a girl of twenty : but a widow of twenty-six is quite a different matter. I think she acted wisely and well all through.

She withdrew her hand from Joe's arm. "Were you blind enough, and foolish enough, to think that you could conceal it from *me*?" That was all she said.

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Joe began, "My dear Mrs. North——" but she interrupted him.

"Come," she said, "we will talk of something else. Like most other men, you can be good-natured, even while you are bitterly unkind. After such a strong instance of the latter, just merely for a change, give me a specimen of the former, and explain this political complication which puzzles us all so."

"Dear Mrs. North," said Joe, in distress, "don't embitter the happiest day of my life by being unkind to me."—The widow's hand immediately went back on to his wrist, and she said, eagerly, "My dear Mr. Burton——"

"There, I knew you were not seriously angry," said Joe, with a brightened face. "Come, I will soon explain the state of affairs, which is so puzzling to the outsiders."

"But are you sure, dear Mr. Burton," said this conscientious and high-souled widow, "that you are violating no confidence? Oh! if you were to render yourself for one moment uneasy by having reposed, in a moment of excitement, confidence in me, the recollection of which would hereafter render you unhappy, I should never, never——"

"I shall keep no secrets from you in future," said Joe, solemnly. Which the widow thought was getting on pretty well, considering.

The dead-lock in public affairs, as described by Joe, in a delicious drive through shade and sunlight, towards the Bend, was simply this. (It is not hard to understand, and will not take long):—

O’Ryan had been a thorough-going ultra-Republican, a man who believed that the summit of human happiness, and of political sagacity, would consist in putting supreme power into the hands of the majority, and letting them settle their own destinies, without taking into account whether or no a population so peculiarly formed as that of Cooksland, were in the least capable of knowing what was best for them, or of electing the men who could.

His innumerable good qualities, his undoubted talents, his great powers of debate gave him, most justly, the entire confidence of his party. He could, most probably, when he first found himself in power, through the fatal folly of James Oxton, have got through a new constitution bill—so liberal, that all backward steps would have been impossible, as it would seem they have become in Victoria; and the carrying out of his extreme theories would have followed shortly as a matter of course. But, before this happened, two persons had been acting on his somewhat facile and plastic nature, and had modified his opinions considerably.

The first of these was Dempsey, the Irish rebel, the greatest anomaly from the island of bulls—a man so good, so pure in life, so unselfish, and so high-minded, that there were times when one was ashamed that he should walk behind one; a man who had shown great political ability, when he was once removed from his craze of independent Irish nationality; and yet a man who, in his frantic effort in 1848, had shown that he was less able to calculate on the earnestness of the peasants, and the power of the Government, than Smith O'Brien or Duffy;—a man who ought to have been respected and loved by everyone for his good qualities; or shot like a mad dog. You never knew whether the former or the latter fate was the right one for him.

This man had a restless craving after power; but since '48 he had learnt what real power was, and saw that it was impossible to enjoy it with such gentlemen as Mr. O'More, and Mr. Brallagan, or with such an organ as the *Mohawk*; and longed to find himself back again among his peers, to have his share of power with the Oxtons and the O'Reillys—to regain the ground he had lost, by what he now thought a wicked and inconsiderate rebellion against a government which, however misguided, was generous and kind. Moreover, though he had been a rebel, he had

never been a Republican. This man, both because he was a relation, and because his eminence was undoubted, had a great deal of influence over O'Ryan, and used it in favour of moderation.

Another person who had great power over him was an old friend, Miss Burke, the peacemaker. She had the profoundest contempt for men of the Brallagan school—men with no qualities worth naming except fierce and noisy impudence, and a profound belief in their own powers. She took care that this contempt should never die out of her cousin's bosom, and certainly few people possessed greater powers of sarcasm than she. No one was ever more able to make any one else contemptible and ridiculous.

Acted on by these people, O'Ryan grew more and more tired of his "tail," and more and more anxious to ally his own talents, and those of the pick of his party, to the other talents of the colony, and form a sound, respectable, moderately liberal government. But what was to be done with the "tail?" To announce without preparation a coalition from which they were excluded, would be to whistle "Vinegar Hill" at a Tipperary fair.

"Hang it," he said, laughing, one day to Dempsey, "I have committed myself to these men, and I can't back out. I will give them an innings. Let them

exhibit their statesmanship before the country ; they will be easier to deal with afterwards."

He did so. With what result we know. Negotiations had been set on foot for a coalition ; and the negotiators had been Miss Burke and Joseph Burton.

Everything had gone smoothly until Mr. Dempsey was brought on the carpet. James Oxtan had gracefully met O'Ryan half way, and O'Ryan had yielded with great good sense. But, when Mr. Dempsey's name was mentioned, Mr. Oxtan peremptorily told Joseph Burton that he would sit in no cabinet with a gentleman who had been in arms against Her Majesty's authority ; and O'Ryan with equal firmness instructed Miss Burke to say that he must decline forming part of any ministry which did not include his friend Dempsey.

"This was the knot all yesterday, dear friend," said Joseph ; "but it is so nobly untied. Dempsey has deputed me to say to Mr. Oxtan that the matter in hand is far nearer to his heart than any personal ambition could be—that he forgoes all his claims, and will earnestly support the new ministry from the back benches."

"Noble fellow !" cried Mrs. North. "And is it this which has made you so happy ?"

"Oh, no; something far different."

"Here we are," said eager Mrs. North, as the carriage dashed quickly into the gravel court-yard, setting the cockatoos screaming, and bringing all the dogs out at them by twenty vomitories. "I will wait and take you back with your answer. Make haste."

Joe was not long gone. "Drive straight to Mr. Dempsey's at the Stockade," he cried. "My dear creature! at length it is all over and done."

"What did Mr. Oxtan say?"

"He said, 'Go, if you please, and tell Mr. Dempsey that I am not to be outdone in nobleness by him or any other man. Say that I request him to sit in the cabinet with us, as a personal favour, and hope to sit there many years with one who has learnt so well, in whatever school, to sacrifice his own ambition for the public good.'"

"You and Lesbia deserve the thanks of every man and woman in the colony. I am proud of your acquaintance. You are to have a seat in the cabinet, of course?"

"Yes, I am to be Minister of Education."

She was looking at him when he said the last three words, and saw that, for the first time, he fully appreciated the grandeur of the position to which he had found himself elevated. As he said the words 'Minister



of Education,' his face flushed and the pupils of his eyes expanded. "That is well," thought Mrs. North. "I wonder if he means to speak."

Apparently he meant to hold his tongue, for he did it. There was a long silence, during which Joe twice turned towards her, and twice turned away. "I suppose I must do it myself, then, after all," thought Mrs. North.

"Ah me!" she said in a sweet low voice; "I suppose I shall see but little of the Minister of Education: you will have but little spare time for my tittle-tattle now. However, the past is our own. You can never deprive me of the recollection of the pleasant talks we have had together; and at all events I can watch your career from a distance. I shall have that pleasure, at all events."

"Mrs. North," began Joe. "If I was not a cripple——" here he stopped again.

Dead silence on the part of Mrs. North.

"If I was not a cripple, I should ask you if I might dare——"

Mrs. North's little hand was gently laid on Joe's.

"Mary, I love you."

"And I love you, Joseph. And I will prove it to you between this and the grave, if God spares me."

"Propose to him myself, dear?" said Mrs. North

to Mrs. Oxton next day. "No, my dear, I assure you on my word of honour that I was not driven so far as that. But I should have done so in ten minutes more, my dear ; and so I don't deceive you."

## CHAPTER XIX.

## SAMUEL BURTON MAKES HIS LAST VISIT TO STANLAKE.

"A CURSED climate," said Samuel Burton, between his set teeth; "a God-forgotten climate. If I can get my boy away out of this, *I'll* never set foot in it again. *He* may come home here and live like a gentleman, when I have made his fortune, and am—"

He could not say the word "dead." He could not face it. He cursed himself for having approached so near the subject. If any one had been watching his face, he would have seen a look of wild ghastly terror in it.

The time and place, when and where, we pick him up again, were not by any means cheerful or inspiring. He was toiling, in pitch darkness, through wild November sleet, over one of the high downs near Croydon, towards Stanlake.

"I wouldn't care for anything," he went on musing, "if it wasn't for that. If I wasn't afraid of dying, I

could be happy. And it aint what is to come after that frightens me, neither ; there is uncertainty enough about *that*. But it is the act of dying which frightens me so. It must be so very, very horrid. Bah ! I have lived a coward, and, oh Lord, I must die a coward. Why, the mere distant dread of the terror I shall feel in dying nearly maddens me. What will the terror itself be like, when I feel it coming on ?”

Although the bitter sleet was driving in his face, and racking his sun-warmed muscles with twinges of rheumatism, yet he found that he was in a sweat—in the sweat of hopeless terror.

“ And yet the main of men aint afraid of it. There was that young keeper at Stanlake in old times—what was his name again?—ah ! Bill Harker, that was the man—that was shot. He died hard enough, but *he* wasn’t afraid of it ; and I wasn’t afraid of seeing a fellow die neither in those times, as I am now. He wasn’t afraid of it for *himself* ; he kept on, when the very death-agony was on him, ‘ Oh, my poor wife ! Oh, what will become of my poor little wife !’ What the devil made him think of *her*, I wonder, at such a time as that, with an ounce of small shot in his stomach ?”

That was very puzzling indeed ; but he did not let it puzzle him long. He came back to the great point

at issue: How this terror of the act of dying—which was undoubtedly a nuisance so great, that at times it made life not worth having—was to be abated or abolished. Nuisances not half so great had been often denounced by the public press as being inconsistent with progress: and yet here was a great standing public nuisance, with no remedy suggested. He was obliged to bring his train of thought to a standstill, and curse the climate "*pour s'amuser*."

"I wish I knew where my boy was living," he began thinking again. "I shall have to make to Morton's lodge; and there are certain risks about that. He might give me up; and, before Sir George could be communicated with, I should be tight in for ten years over the Lawrence Street business. It's a terrible risk my being here. Why, Sir George couldn't save me, if I was seen by the traps. However, I'll have my boy out of this if I die for it."

As he walked he got drenched to the skin in the icy shower; and his courage cooled. "I hardly dare go near him; I think I must be mad; but he is never the man to give up an old fellow-servant who knows so much. No."

Scrambling down the steep chalk wall of Whitley Hill, he came to the long grass ride through Whitley Copse which led to Morton's lodge. The moon, fighting

with the north-easterly scud, shone out sometimes and showed him his way ; so, during a longer gleam than any which had gone before, he found himself close to the lodge, which was perfectly dark and silent in the moonlight ; though he could see that another great bank of rack was driving up, and that night would soon be black once more.

He hesitated, and then whistled. As he had expected, Rory and Tory (Irish), Lad and Ony (Ladoga and Onega, Russian), Don and Sancho (Spanish), Lady and Lovely (Clumber), not to mention Vic, Jip, Jack, Nip, Pip, Dick, and Snap (English terriers), took up the question all at once : declared that they had never closed an eye ; that they had heard him a mile off, but had deep political reasons for not barking before ; and generally behaved with that mixture of humbug and overstrained conscientiousness which dogs assume when they are taken by surprise.

Samuel had lived so long in a country where hydrophobia is unknown that he had almost forgotten the existence of that horrible disease ; and would far sooner have faced a dangerous dog than an innocent slow-worm. He merely scolded them away, right and left, and, going up to the door, knocked loudly.

A voice, evidently from bed, said, "Father, is that you?"

He said, "Yes, Reuben. Get up, and let me in."

The owner of the voice was heard instantly to get out of bed. In a few moments a young man had opened the door, and was standing before Samuel in his shirt and breeches, looking at him with eager curiosity. But it was not Reuben; it was a taller young man than he, with a very square face, and keen blue eyes. Though he had nothing on but his breeches and shirt, he stood there with his bare legs in the cold night air for more than half a minute, staring at Samuel.

Samuel saw the father's face at once. "You are young Morton," he said.

"Yes," said the young man; "and, from what you said just now, you must be Reuben's father, Sam Burton. I have heard a deal of you, but I never thought to have seen you. Come in."

Young Morton dressed himself, and took another long look at Samuel. "So you are come after Reuben?"

"No," said Samuel, lying because it was easiest. "I have come after your father; but where is Reuben?"

"He is with father."

"Can you tell me where your father is? I want to see him on a matter of life and death."

The young man turned his face to the fire, and remained silent a long time. At last he said,—

"I hope I am not doing wrong in telling you, Mr. Burton. I was told to tell no one. We are in terrible trouble and confusion here, and I hope I shall not increase it. But I will sleep over it. You must stay here to-night, and to-morrow morning, unless I alter my mind, I will tell you."

Young Morton did not alter his mind in the morning; just before they parted he said—

"You know the Black Lion, Church Street, Chelsea?"

Samuel rather thought he did. He, however, expressed to young Morton that he had some *vague* recollection of a licensed victualler's establishment, not a hundred miles from that spot, with a somewhat similar sign.

Young Morton laughed. "Well, my father and Reuben are to be heard of there," he said.

"But, my dear young man," said Samuel, "I put it to you whether I dare go near the place. Come."

"I don't know anything about that, Mr. Burton. There they are; and, if you want to see them, there you must go. Good morning."



## CHAPTER XX.

SIR GEORGE AND SAMUEL CLOSE THEIR ACCOUNTS, AND  
DISSOLVE PARTNERSHIP.

SNEAKING from pillar to post; sauntering into doorways and waiting till suspicious persons had passed; sometimes again walking briskly, as though with a purpose before him, and sometimes turning his back on the place for which he was bound; Samuel Burton at length reached the narrow passage which leads into Garden Grove, and set himself to watch the Black Lion.

It was eight o'clock, and a bitterly bleak night. The keen east wind, after roaming through the dust heaps in Garden Grove, concentrated itself, and rushed through this passage, as through a large organ pipe, of which Samuel formed the reed. His whole body began to give forth a dull, monotonous wail from every projection, which increased in volume with the strength of the agonizing wind, but never altered one

single note. When he *did* get to bed after this eventful night he instantly dreamt that he was an Æolian harp, and that Sir George Hillyar the elder came and tuned him.

The dry, searching wind, intensely cold, pinched up his already pinched-up face, until it looked more like that of a weasel than of a man; and his long, thin nose, red and blue, peered querulously out into the darkness, as though he were looking with that, and not with the beady eyes above it, deep sunk under his heavy eyebrows. There came two impudent and low-lived boys into the passage, the one of whom formally introduced him to the other. "This, Ben," said the young ruffian, "is my uncle, the undertaker's man. He's a-waiting for a ride home in the hearse, and is going inside, as his lungs is delicate."

He really did look like something of that kind; for, when he had taken to pietism, to see what that would do for him; he had, as being the first and easiest step in that direction, taken to dress himself in black clothes with a white necktie; and, although he had given up religion as a bad job, finding that even the lowest and most superstitious form of it demanded inexorably a moral practice which to him seemed a ghastly impossibility; yet he clung, at all events, to what he considered one of the outward symbols of godliness, and

always appeared in public in a costume so scrupulously correct, that it would have stricken one of our advanced young parsons dumb, with a mingled feeling of wonder and contempt.

So he stood for a long time, shivering with cold, and thinking whether he dared show himself in the bar of the Black Lion, and concluding most unhesitatingly that he dared not. But, if Reuben and Morton were to be heard of there, there was every chance of his seeing one or another of them coming in or out; so he waited. I suspect it is easier for an old convict to wait than for you or me. When one has got accustomed to wait in the blank horrid darkness of a prison cell for the warder to bring one one's food, waiting becomes easy, although patience may be a virtue which has taken wings long ago.

So he waited impatiently, cursing time, for one knows not how long. But after a while he cursed no more, and was impatient no more. Every other feeling was absorbed in one—intense eager curiosity.

The shrill driving easterly wind had brought the London smoke with it, mixed with fog; it had been barely possible to see across the street. Samuel had tried, three or four times, to make out the vast looming mass of Church Place, the old home of the Burtons, in the darkness, and had not succeeded. But by one of

those laws which guide the great river fogs, some side puff of wind, or some sudden change in the weight of the atmosphere, the river fog was lifted, and the whole of the great house stood out before him. It was all dark below, but aloft the great dormer window—the window of Reuben's old room—was blazing with light.

He watched now with bated breath. He could see the old palings which surrounded the house, and saw that the gate in them was open. He had not long found out this, when he saw Reuben and Morton together come out from that gate, cross the street, and go into the "Black Lion."

Like a cat, like a weasel, like a slinking leopard—like a young member, with no faith save the rules of debate, whatever they may be, who sits with hungry eyes to catch a poor old man, old enough to be his grandfather, tripping—Samuel Burton slid across the street, and passed unobserved and wondering into the old house.

His first idea had been to wait about in the vast rooms, which he saw were lightless and deserted, until he found out how the land lay; and with this view he slipped into the great room on the first floor, and waited there in the dark. But not for long. There were too many ghosts there; and ghosts, as every one

knows, have no manners—they have never yet been made to take any hint, however strongly given, that their company is unacceptable: they will not behave even like the most tiresome of morning visitors, and go when the lady of the house sees something remarkable out of window. The behaviour of the ghosts in this empty old room was exceedingly rude toward the miserable, godless, superstitious old convict.

One gentleman, indeed, an ex-warder, whose brains Samuel had seen knocked out with a shovel, in a stringy-bark forest, some fifteen years before, was so offensively assiduous in his attentions that he found it necessary to go out on to the stairs, and, when there, to go up them towards what might be capture and ruin, sooner than have any further *tête-à-tête* with the Sintram companions, whose acquaintance he had made in a life of selfish rascality.

But he really was not much alarmed; he saw there was some hole-and-corner work going on, and that gave him confidence. People who took possession of the garrets of deserted houses must be doing something secret, something in his way. The risk was certainly great, but he determined to face it. Sneaking curiosity had become a second nature to him; and, besides, it was not a much greater danger, than he had run in approaching the place at all.

So he gained the door of Reuben's room, and looked in, and then drew back amazed. It was comfortably furnished, and full of light, not only from a blazing fire, but from two or three candles dispersed about it. Everything was still, except a heavy breathing of some sleepers; and after a momentary hesitation he looked in again.

On a sofa opposite to him was stretched a large man, sleeping heavily. In a bed close to the fire lay another man, with his face turned from him, and both were apparently asleep. The man on the sofa had his face turned towards him, and he could see every feature plainly. And, after the first glance at that face, curiosity mastered every other feeling, and he went softly in and gazed on him.

A big, red-faced, handsome giant, whose chest went gently up and down in the deep breathing of sleep, and whose innocent, silly mouth was wreathed into a smile at some foolish dream. Samuel thrust his long thin nose close to him, and his little eyes dilated with a maddened curiosity. He knew him, and he didn't know him. Who on earth *was* it? As he stood there watching, risk, time, place, everything was forgotten. Where *had* he seen this man before? He sent his memory ranging back to the very beginning of his life, and could not remember. Had he gone mad?—

or had he slept for twenty years, and had Erne Hillyar grown into this ?


And who could that be in bed ? A sick man, for the evidences of sickness were there in plenty. Curiosity and awe had overmastered fear now ; he stole to the bed, sat down in a chair beside it, and watched, wondering, till the sick man should turn his face towards him, feeling that when he did so this wonderful riddle would be redd.

He did not wait many minutes. Sir George Hillyar turned uneasily towards him, and recognised him, and Samuel saw the word "death" written on his face.

We are strange, contradictory creatures ! — the highest and the lowest of us : David (David, King of Israel, I mean, not the painter) and Marat, who are, I take it, for noticeable men, about the Antipodes of one another. Call it a truism ; it is none the less true. When this wretched scoundrel saw his old master dying here miserably, before his years were ripe, a purer and nobler sentiment warmed his rotten old heart, and showed itself in those darkened little windows of his eyes, than had place in him since he had knelt at his mother's knee. Deep, deep pity. It bore no lasting fruit ; the man died as he had lived — for amendment seems to become an impossibility

after a certain point, at least in this world. But, though the spring got choked up once more, still it *had* welled up, and shown that there was water beneath the soil.

The history of the soul of a thorough-going rascal like Samuel Burton "remains to be written." We can't do it; we can only describe the outside of such, and say what we saw them do under such circumstances, as we have done with Samuel Burton. As for what they think, feel, and believe, they lie so horribly and habitually that the chances are ten to one that every other word they speak is false. Samuel Burton's character has been sketched after long and intimate confidences with many convicts. I used at one time to make after a new convict as I would after a new butterfly, and try—hopeless task!—to find out when he was lying and when he was telling the truth. The result has been Samuel Burton. But I have, at all events, found out two things. The first is, that a man who has just told you with infinite glee about the share he had in robbing a church, will invariably deny, with virtuous indignation, that he had any share whatever in the crime for which he was transported. His brother always did *that*; and his wife, in a moment of misplaced confidence, received the stolen property into the house in a basket of greens, which was found





standing on the sink when the "traps" came. And the second is that, until we can catch a thorough-bred scoundrel, with high literary ability, and strict regard to truth, we had better not talk too fast about the reformation of criminals.

I can only say that the case of Samuel Burton was just as I have stated it. Sir George and he recognised one another at once, but Sir George spoke first.

"Is it you in the flesh, or are you but another dream?"

"It is I, Sir George, and I am deeply grieved to find you here, and so ill. But cheer up, sir, we will set you right in no time, sir. You must come over to Stanlake, and get about, sir. You will soon be well."

"I am dying, Samuel. I have been going too hard, harder than ever; and you know how hard *that* is! Whence have you come?"

"From Australia, Sir George."

"So you were there all the time," said Sir George, evincing a feeble interest. "Well, all that is over; I forgive, and hope to be forgiven. When you know what I have to tell you, you will use your power mercifully."

"I have reason to believe that my power is gone, sir."

"How so?"

"Your brother Erne is dead."

"Poor Erne! Tell me how."

"He died gold-hunting, sir."

"Poor fellow! poor fellow! I wonder if he forgave me?"

"He loved you, Sir George."

"I dare say. I can see many things now. I would put much to rights if I lived. I dare say he is better off where he is. When I see him I shall tell him the whole business."

"But you are not going to die, Sir George; there are years of life in you yet. Come, sir, you must get well, and we will put things on another footing."

Sir George Hillyar actually laughed. "Why do you go on lying to a dying man, Samuel? you saw death in my face, or you would never have told me that Erne was dead. Morton and Reuben are on the stairs now—I hear them. If Erne is dead, I have strength left to tell them to hand you over to the next policeman for the Stanlake robberies—I holding your circumstantial confession of them."

"You wouldn't do it, Sir George. Come, I know you won't do it. See, time is short; they are coming. I wish I may be struck dead if this aint the real

truth. Mr. Erne is not *known* to be dead, but he is missing. He may have got to some station on the Ovens, or Mitta, or King, hard up, and be staying there. You won't go and beggar your own child, and ruin me at this time of day. The wrong is done, and can't be mended now. Die silent, sir, like a fox. Think of your son, sir."

"How can I die silent, you villain," said poor Sir George, raising himself in bed, "with you here persuading me to leave this miserable world with an act of rascality? I could have done it, I was going to do it, for I don't fear death like you, you hound; but the devil, nay, it may be God, has sent you here to put the whole villany of the matter before me once more, and force me either to ruin my heir Reuben, or to die like a scoundrel, with a crime against poor innocent Erne on my soul. Is he dead or alive? You will soon be either one or the other if you tempt me to rise from this bed and fall upon you."

"I don't know, rightly, sir," said Samuel, rising as pale as a sheet. "Strike me blind if I know. I was only begging you to let things go on as they were, and not say anything about the will in my possession, partly because I am an old man, a poor feeble old man, sir, and partly because I should not like to see your beautiful little angel of a son—I should not like to

see that dear child—and he came into my hut two months ago, when her ladyship lost herself in the bush—and he came into my poor little place like a praying seraph—because I should not like to see him left with only Stanlake, mortgaged over head and ears—”

Sir George laughed again. “Magnificent bathos,” he said. “So you have seen my wife and child, hey? But, oh, most strangely complicated liar, I was not thinking of that poor little brat, but of my dear devoted son and heir, Reuben.”

“Reuben?”

“Yes, Reuben. That poor fool deceived us all. Curse you, I am not going into all that horrible business again on my death-bed. Have some decency. You did not know that I was married in Scotland.”

“I did not accompany you to Scotland, sir.”

“No. Even in my wickedness I had grace enough left to leave you behind. The new atmosphere was at all events purer than the old. But who did?”

“Young Bob, the keeper’s son from the Wiltshire farms, went with you, sir—her ladyship’s brother.”

“And do you know who is lying on that sofa?—Bob, old fellow, get up; I want some lemonade.”

The giant rose up, and Samuel was puzzled no more. He knew him now, poor drunken Uncle Bob. “I will get you your drink, Sir George, if you will allow me,”

he said. And Sir George said, "Never mind, Bob; lie down again"—which Uncle Bob did.

"He was so awfully like Mr. Erne when he was asleep that I was puzzled," said Samuel. "Now, Sir George, let us have a little quiet talk about this delusion of yours."

"Delusion! It is shared among others by Compton, who considers the legal evidence quite sufficient. I married her in Scotland. I never told you that—Reuben is my legitimate son— She concealed the fact from Morton— She never believed herself really married, and I hardly thought that such a farce could be binding in law. But she many times voluntarily told Bob the whole truth, and left a witnessed statement. It is no use to fight against facts, you know. You may fight, but in six hours Reuben will be in possession of Stanlake. And, if Erne is dead, of the rest."

It seemed so very consistent and so very like truth that Samuel felt it must be true. The best cards were all in his adversary's hand, and his adversary had shown him his cards, careless whether he won or lost. Poor Samuel had but three ways of playing—threatening, lying, and whining; and now he tried the last, not because he dreamt of its succeeding—for so stony-hearted is the world that he had never found it do any

good whatever—but because—because— Well, I do not know why; they always do it. Detect a liar for yourself; wait till the impudent defiant fit is over, and he begins to whine, and then ask him what he expects to gain by it. If he cannot tell you, I am sure I cannot.

“Are you going to have no mercy on a poor broken old man, Sir George? Are you going to take my boy from me, and leave me no one to comfort and console me on the way to my miserable grave?”

“Yes,” said Sir George, angrily. “I wish to be at peace.”

Samuel rose, for Morton and Reuben were in the room. He went and talked to them while Sir George Hillyar was sleeping; and after a time Mr. Compton came in, and the whole miserable business was talked through between him, Uncle Bob, Mr. Compton, and Morton. He saw that the proofs were overwhelming, and after a time went and sat by himself, feeling, poor dog, more unutterably lonely, deserted, and miserable than he had ever felt in his life.

He sat awake all night. Towards morning, when Mr. Compton had gone, and the other three were asleep, he heard Sir George move, and instantly went towards him. Sir George’s face was calmer now, and even kind—he stretched out his hand to Samuel, and said,

"Let us forgive one another. We have both to receive punishment, but my mind is not such a shifting quicksand as yours, and I think I see that I am the most to blame. We have both fallen, I cannot quite see why or how, into a horrible pitful of moral evil; or, to put it more truly, I, with the strongest nature, fell, and dragged you with me. You, my poor Samuel, don't know truth from falsehood, or right from wrong; I doubt if you ever did. I have always seen the difference, and in consequence have made such a hell of this world that I have some idea—some notion — But I have nothing to go upon, except my own possibly distorted notions of justice. What matters it ~~my~~ speculating? I shall soon be in possession of facts. I see—I mean, I feel—one thing: that I wish to forgive, and be forgiven; and so I tell you that I have been seeking your life these two years. Can you forgive that?"

"Yes! yes! But you are not going to die! You could not be dying, and speak so calm as this!"

"My throat is even now choking. The effort of reathing in my next sleep will wake me, and you will hear me rattling, and I shall die—probably without speaking. Say all you have to say now."

"But are you not afraid, sir? Is it not terrible to die?"

"What on earth can there be to be *afraid* of? The future is doubtful, certainly—the sooner over the better. But it *must* come sooner or later."

"Certainly, sir; but the act of dying—I beg pardon. I have to say to you, sir, that whatever I have to forgive is freely forgiven. And," continued Samuel, in a burst of emotion, really at the moment heartfelt, though possibly somewhat out of place, "you have much to forgive also. But tell me, sir, what I am to do about this will?"

"I don't know," said Sir George Hillyar; "I can't decide a question between morality and sentiment on my deathbed. It depends on whether Erne is dead or no. I don't know what it depends on. I thought you were very fond of Reuben."

"So I was, sir. But what is Reuben to me now?"

"Then you never loved him for his own sake. There is no doubt of his paternity. I did."

He was silent after this for some time, and Samuel thought he was asleep. But after a few minutes he roused up, and said again, "Is all forgiven?" And Samuel said, "All, sir." And then he fell asleep.

Samuel sat watching him till near six, and then he roused the others. Sir George was right as to the



result, though wrong as to the cause. There was no rattling in his throat. The cold morning air found its way to his drink-rotted lungs, and they ceased to cre-pitate. He woke, sighed, and died.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## REUBEN'S TEMPTATION.

SIR REUBEN HILLYAR and old Morton made much of Samuel, and explained to him the circumstance of his being there. After some time Morton and Uncle Bob left, and Reuben and Samuel were alone together.

"Can we go anywhere and have some conversation together, Sir Reuben?" said Samuel.

It was the first time he had been called by his title, and he started. He proposed that they should go to a room over the way, and so they went.

It was an exceedingly awkward interview. Samuel sat with his head buried in his hands, and did not speak. Reuben had to begin.

"I am afraid you feel this very keenly. I was shocked at first at our change of relationship, for you were very kind to me. I thank you for all your kindness to me, and shall always remain fond of you."

Still no answer. Reuben saw that the old man was crying, and spoke to him still more gently.

"I am very sorry that we should have to separate, but I fear that it would not be safe for you to remain in England. Your company was always pleasant to me, even when it involved danger."

"We never had one word together, Reuben—had we?" said Samuel, who had now found his voice.

"Never one," said Reuben. "I fear you must have thought me unkind in not communicating with you lately, but he had persuaded me of all this long before Uncle Robert came to Sir George to unbosom himself about what my mother had told him, and to ask his advice. That was the reason of my silence. I could not write to you, 'my dear Father,' could I?"

"I was right, then, in thinking that it was his doing," said Samuel. "It is lucky for all of us that he did not provoke me to do something which I had it in my power to do—very lucky. If I had been aggravated into putting Erne on the throne, I should have been sorry for it now."

Reuben, not understanding what he meant, and hearing Erne's name, said,

"And so poor Erne is dead?"

"Don't you be so sure of that, my—Sir Reuben.

Don't be too sure of that. You may find yourself a beggar yet."

"How so?"

"Like this, my dear sir. The late Sir George Hillyar—your grandfather I am alluding to—made a will, by which he left 8,000*l.* a year to Mr. Erne, and only Stanlake and 2,000*l.* to your father. If Mr. Erne were not dead,—and, if you press me hard, I don't think he is,—the production of that will would ruin you, would it not?"

"I suppose it would. Well?"

"That will is in my possession," whispered Samuel eagerly. "I stole it. Ha! ha! What do you think of that? Stole it."

"I hope you will give it up."

"It ruins you. Do you see? Silence! Was that any one coming? Here it is. Take it; there is the fire, do you see? blazing high. Be quick; it will soon be over."

The old man actually drew the will from his breast pocket, and put it—with his long thin fingers trembling while he grudgingly relinquished the terrible power which he had held so long—into Reuben's hand. Reuben took it and looked at it, saying,

"Well, this beats everything. This is actually the will, is it? Well, it's a nuisance, but it can't be helped.

I must drop my title and emigrate, I suppose." So saying, he put the will in his breast and buttoned his coat over it.

"Put it in the fire, you fool," said old Samuel, clutching Reuben's arm with his long fingers; "put it in the fire, or I'll tear it away from you again. If you were to meet with an accident and that was found on you, you'd be transported."

"It shan't be on me long," said Reuben. "It shall be in Mr. Compton's hands in an hour."

"I'll tear it from you!" said Samuel, rising on him fiercely. "You daren't—you won't—hit an old man like me. And I'll tear it out of your false heart if you don't give it to me. Damn you, do you think I am going to sit by and see my game thrown to the four winds like this? I gave it to you from pure love, and now you are going to do justice with it! Do you think I perilled my life and my immortal soul to have justice done? Confound you, I'll have it back again. I'll tear it out of your heart, you false, ungrateful lad. Give it up!"

The old man threw himself on to Sir Reuben, and plucked at the breast of his coat. But Sir Reuben laid his strong hand quietly on the old man's breast, and merely said, "Steady; steady, dad. Remember, for God's sake what the effect of a row would be here, and now!"

Samuel was quiet in an instant. He sat down and began another line of action, far more dangerous to Reuben than any amount of violence would have been.

He waited a little before he began. At last he said,—

“It’s a fine thing to be a baronet.”

“I suppose so,” said Reuben ; “but I haven’t thought about it yet. I haven’t realized my position.”

“I’d sooner,” said Samuel, looking up at him, with a cat-like leer from under his lowering eyebrows, “for my part, be a sweep, or what is worse, a cooper,—nay anything, than be a Bart. without property.”

Reuben said, “Ah!”

“You have no prestige. Nobody cares for a Bart. If you were a lord, with a seat in the Upper House, that’s another thing. Your order would take care of you. I believe there’s a fund for poor Lords. But a Bart! Lord! the things I’ve seen poor Barts. drove to. Some of them goes on the stage for a time, till the public are sick of ’em. Some of them billiard-marks; all of them trades on their title, and takes to drink. There is no place for a broken-down Bart. under heaven; and that’s what you are unless you put that paper in the fire.”

No particular effect on Reuben; at least, no answer.

“Ah, how bitterly you’ll find *that* out in a year’s time, with nothing but Stanlake, and Erne’s claims

upon it! Why, if he presses his claim, you are a ruined and miserable man : and it is not too late to alter it, even yet."

Poor Reuben began to look haggard and thoughtful. Who can blame him that in the first flush of his new fortunes he had looked forward with delighted anticipation to the splendid future? He had built already a grand edifice of fancy for himself ; and here sat old Samuel, with his cowering face half turned upwards towards him, inexorably, with infinite dexterity, pulling it down about his ears ; and yet reminding that he still held in his hand the power of rebuilding it in one instant. He began to get very unhappy. Samuel saw that he was producing an effect, and changed his tune with infinite knowledge of his man.

"But don't let us talk any more of this. There's a bright future before you ; and, if Mr. Erne is alive, you may make it up to him."

"Is he alive, or is he not?" said Reuben impatiently. "One time you say one thing, and at another time another."

"He is alive sure enough," said Samuel. "But listen to me. Do you know all the pleasures of ten thousand a year, lad? Have you ever thought of them? Have you ever thought of what you are giving up? Why, your position, in case of your not

making a fool of yourself, will be one of the most enviable in the whole world. Think of what it is to be a country gentleman, and how well you are suited for it. There's your horses and dogs now ; and what's to prevent your taking the Vine hounds into your own hands, declining subscriptions, and making a king of yourself? Or your horses, once more! Is there anything against Sir Reuben Hillyar owning a Dutchman or a Voltigeur, having his share in the maddest five minutes of the year—ay, and coming out the envied of England? Boy, boy! you have heard them coming over the grass, round Tattenham corner, four or five of them together, so close that you might lay a tablecloth over them. You know that maddening music, do you? Why, I am an old man, but it sends the blood buzzing and tingling into my ears even now when I think of it. Don't say I haven't hit you there; for I saw your eye kindle; you are a born sportsman. And Morton says you are shooting beautifully. Ah, dear! those woodcocks in the hollies: it takes a man for them."

Reuben said, "Well; have you done?"

"The girls, the lasses, the ladies, hey," continued old Samuel, as though he hadn't heard him. "The real ladies. The carefully educated women, ugly or pretty—the women formed by the traditions of a dozen generations of refinement. You fool; do you know



what you are throwing away by cutting yourself off from all hopes of coming near *them*? I do. I was brought up among them, and used to watch their ways; and the recollection of them used to make the hulks, and the prison, and the wretched pothouse life into which I was driven, a hell to me; for *I* was born for a gentleman. Haven't I waited on them; and don't I know how the very plainest of them gets, from the very air in which she lives, a grace and a refinement—a power of fascination which no girl in our rank of life can even understand? I know this; and you——”

Reuben rose. “How many of them are like Emma Burton?” he said. “How many of them would have followed me to the den to which you led me, and have saved me at the risk of her life? *She* is my model of a woman, and I want none better. She always led me from evil, and showed me good. If Erne is dead, my life and fortune shall be devoted to taking his place, so help me God. She may forget him in time; and I may grow worthy of her in time. It is that glorious girl's influence,” continued he, snarling in his speech, as his cockney, *poco curante* etiquette broke down under stress of circumstances, “that enables me to tell you that what you wish me to do is impossible; for that, if I did it, I should never dare to look upon her face again.”

They spoke no more together. Before the silence had become awkward, Mr. Compton's voice was heard outside, inquiring for Sir Reuben Hillyar. Reuben went out to him, and taking the will from his breast pocket, held it out to him, smiling.

"Do you know this paper?" he said.

"Good God!" said Compton. "It is your grandfather's will. I know it well enough, for I drew it up. It is the will that couldn't be found. How on earth did *you* come by it? You must have stronger faith in Erne's death than I have, from that miserable old liar's account, or you would have put it in the fire. Where on earth has it been?"

"It has been on its travels," said Sir Reuben, pointing over his shoulder towards the room where Samuel Burton still sat. "Lady Hillyar's liver and tan spaniel found it on the floor, and seeing it smelt meaty, being parchment, began gnawing it; when in came her ladyship's white Persian cat, with her three white kittens, wanting some of it, considering as a mother of three that the assertion of her rights was a sacred duty. And the dog, conceiving them, from their colour and from the solemnity of their demeanour, to be avenging angels, hooked it up the chimney, and shut the register after him, having forgotten in his guilty terror to let go of the will."

"My dear Sir Reuben!" put in Mr. Compton.

"AND," continued Reuben, determined to atone for his late exhibition of earnestness by going into higher flights of nonsense than he had ever attempted heretofore, and rising to the circumstances, "that dog remained in that chimney for four days, sometimes trying to get out at the top, from which he was prevented by the cowl; sometimes attempting, with a perseverance and an intelligence to which the attention of writers on the natural history of the friend of man cannot be called too soon, to raise the register with his fore feet. During all this time the dog, whether terrified by his position, or (as seems more probable) beginning to feel a natural remorse at having abstracted——"

"Now steady, my dear Sir Reuben," put in Mr. Compton. "Never mind where this will have been. We have got it now. That is all."

"Say no more about it," said Reuben. "I will tell you, when it is safe to do so, the story about it. Meanwhile, if it is good in law, let it take effect. If Erne is dead I will devote half my life to win Emma Burton."

## CHAPTER XXII.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY.—TREVITTICK THE CONSOLER.

AND so poor Erne was dead ! Noble, affectionate Erne Hillyar, who had lit down among all the commonplace squalor of Chelsea, and had made friends with me above all other lads, and had taught me to love him also—he was dead. The fate which seemed to hang over the two houses whenever they were brought together had stooped down once more. He had fallen in love with my sister ; and she, refusing him through a foolish overstrained sense of duty, had made him desperate, and he had gone south and was dead.

I was not angry with her about it. I thank God now that I never blamed her ; I loved her too well for that, and I felt, I think, in a less degree every arrow of grief which went through her heart. When, after the third day, she fled to me—to me of all others—for comfort, I took her to my heart and felt something like a gleam of sunshine. Though I had persuaded her,

almost bullied her to forego her silly resolution, yet she loved me above all others yet. I knew that she did not fly to me because I had loved him who was dead best of living men, and was the more likely to talk of him : I was quite sure of that, and I think I am so now. No : on consideration I am certain she came to me, because she loved me for my own sake, better than all the world, now that he was gone.

In the old days when I used to go courting Martha by Clerkenwell Prison, where we used to get the omnibus and go out to Hampstead Heath and wander all day hand-in-hand, among the furze-bushes, until the time came for her to go back to her hideous drudgery, we two intensely happy fools used to talk about this Erne Hillyar, until Martha believed in him like a god. She believed in me to an immense extent, and does so still, I think. I think that at this very time she has a lurking belief that I not only found the copper-mine, but made the copper and put it there ready to be found, and that consequently she looks on the copper-works as a triumph of sagacity on her part, in having selected me to keep company with in the old times when I was only a blacksmith's apprentice. She believed in Erne, from my account of him, as some one who moved in a higher sphere than ours, possessed of qualities to which we could never attain. Her mother had taught

her, either before her Catechism, or else with such remarkable emphasis, that the Catechism sank into insignificance, that gentlemen were wolves and scoundrels, and that she was never to say anything more to a gentleman than yes or no. But she had never considered Erne to be a gentleman. She went about with me during our courtship on that very question. "You profess to love him," she said, "and call him *that*." I was obliged to keep the fact of Saint Erne being a gentleman, in the background.

When that pretty cracked little Lady Hillyar came wandering to our house, asking to be taken care of, Emma brightened up a little, and accepted her work cheerfully; she went south again and left me alone in my grief. I say comparatively alone, for I think that my wife's grief was mainly for me; and I tried to hide it from her as much as possible. I could not bear the anxious look that came in that dear face when she saw me moping and brooding, or those pitiful offerings up of the baby, to be kissed, at the shrine of her love. Dear soul, she did not know what to say to comfort me; but she had found the baby a sovereign remedy for every small vexation in her own case, and so she used to administer it to me whenever my head went down upon my hands, and my face grew vacant as my mind wandered off after what might have been. Baby was

very well for a few minutes ; but it was too young to talk, and was generally given back to its mother, who stood with anxious eyes watching the father's face. God bless thee, wife ! Summer and winter come and go ; the storm rattles over head, and goes crashing and booming away towards the mountains, and leaves a sky of cloudless blue behind it from horizon to zenith ; but thy love has never waxed or waned, neither in gingham and woollen, nor, as we are now, in brocade and diamonds.

I suspect that, if I hadn't been brought up a blacksmith, I should have been something else, provided I had brains enough : on which last point I am not sure, but on which my family seemed to have satisfied themselves in the negative ; though why they always come to me about all questions, which any brains of better quality than those of a —— well —— could have settled in a moment, I am at a loss to conceive. I suspect also that there is some of the poetical faculty about me (hitherto strictly latent), because I am accustomed to walk out of nights, when anything goes wrong.

I took to doing this now, because I was in really deep distress about Erne, and because I found that these long night-walks made me sleep soundly, until the time came for me to get up and go to the mine. Men at twenty-one can do with wonderfully little sleep,

and an amazing deal of work. You see there is so much more phosphorus in the brain then, or something of that kind.

And again, although I had intended these night-walks of mine to be solitary walks in which I might think over the memory of him who was gone, yet it was perhaps fortunate for me that my humour was not allowed to have its course. I soon had a companion.

Trevittick was a man who scorned to do anything like any one else, and he kept up his character on this occasion. Knowing what an affectionate nature he really had beneath his quaint shell, and knowing how deeply he had attached himself to poor Tom Williams, I dreaded the burst of grief which would ensue when he heard of his death, not only on account of his loss here, but because I felt sure that Trevittick would, like a thorough *Heautontimoroumenos*, torture himself with some insane speculation on the probable destiny of poor Tom's soul. What was my astonishment at his receiving the news with a burst of thanksgiving, and at his going about his work that day with an air of pious cheerfulness ! I really did not know whether to laugh, or to be provoked, at this new vagary of his. But, in the evening, my curiosity to know in what way he would account for his conduct ; in what light he would put



the matter before his strangely-distorted mind, overcame my manners, and I asked him to explain.

He scornfully doubted if a person so dead to higher religious life as I, was capable of understanding his explanation.

I simply said I would try.

He then said that he had every reason to believe that Tom, though unawakened, was elect; that the elect who died before their awakening, entered into glory, into a higher destiny than was possible for us; for they were awakened in bliss unutterable: whereas we must wait and wander, and fall and rise, and only afar off——

Here the poor fellow completely broke down. The outward exhibition of his grief was as wild and fierce as his self-command had been wonderful. It was a long time before that powerful mouth could set itself once more, still longer before I ceased to detect a fluttering of the lip when he spoke.

He was very angry with himself and with me about this outbreak. On the very next occasion, which occurred immediately, he "gave it to me" in right good earnest. I, speaking from my heart, and thinking in some way to comfort him, said,—

"Poor Tom Williams!—poor dear Tom!"

He fired up immediately. He said I was blaspheming.

to apply the epithet "poor" to a saint in glory. He said I was as bad as a miserable idiot of an old woman at a funeral, who in one breath would speak of the deceased as being happy in heaven, and in the next would "poor dear" him and begin howling. I took his rebuke in my usual ox-like manner, and, moreover did not laugh—which I somehow felt inclined to do—at the quaint mixture of sentimentality, shame of that sentimentality, fanaticism, and logical thought which he showed; and which, combined with extravagance and avarice in about equal portions, and a "clannishness"—a belief in Cornwall and things Cornish—before which the Scotticism of Professor Blackie shows like a feeble, half-developed instinct: makes up the character of that strange race who live beyond the Tamar, and of whom many are about as much like Englishmen as the Samoeydes.


I only went for one walk alone, and then he found me out. The next time I started he was waiting for me, and I was glad of his company, for the weather was deadly still, dull, and sultry, and there was no movement in the forest; except sometimes the distant crack and crash of a falling bough; and now and then, while the blood-red moon hung overhead, the wild wail of a native dog, like the feeble cry of a dying child, which faded away into silence, and left the hot oppressiveness

of the forest more unbearable than before. It was not well to walk alone in the forest at midnight that summer.

We never made any arrangement as to where we should walk ; but our feet, by some tacit, unexpressed instinct, always carried us the same way, almost to the same spot—southward, to the summit of the Cape Wilberforce Mountain, where we could look over the sleeping forest, stretched out beneath the lurid moon, towards Victoria, the land where our unburied loved ones lay dead.

I used to talk but little. I was unable, either by education or intellect, to hold my own with Trevittick in argument. He alone talked. He talked to me a great deal, but I soon found that he was talking to himself—was using me as a “Speaker,” as a man set there for him to put his cases to, like the personages in Plato’s dialogues, put up to be demolished ; as a man to whom he might without personality vent his strange theories about God’s dealings with man—theories got principally from the Old Testament, which he had, as it were, eaten raw, without any salt of scholastic divinity whatever ; and which had consequently disagreed with him terribly, and sometimes nearly driven him mad. In some of his moods he would claim that there was a higher law, which we

were incapable of understanding—a law which set aside our notions of human morality; in another, that the deepest and most subtle lesson which the Old Testament taught was that morality was unnecessary to understanding God, which was the only object of life: nay, more, that it was a stumbling-block set before our feet by the fiend. This he would illustrate by such questions as that of the assassination of tyrants; in such a temper, too, as made me feel certain that, if Cardinal Wiseman ever did preach in Westminster Abbey, and Trevittick happened to be among the congregation, his Eminence would meet with an accident, and one of the best preachers in England would preach no more. At another time again he would maintain, and uncommonly well, that the right of taking human life was taken from man the morning when Christ was born. Such a mass of rambling, confused thought was never yet put before a half-educated man as Trevittick put before me during these midnight walks; and the man was so clever, and so amazingly eloquent too, that he dragged me triumphantly at the wheels of his chariot, and fully persuaded me of each of his theories in succession; until, sometimes, coming home in the morning, as the ghastly red sun had risen, and left the moon hanging overhead with a sickly, pale face, as of an obstinate ghost who had refused to depart



at cockcrow ; I used to deliberate whether or no Baby himself, lying with his tender fingers tangled in my wife's hair, was not an invention of the fiend, sent to lure me to my destruction.

Heaven defend me from having that Weather and that Man sent to me at the same time again ! I should go mad. I could possibly, having the constitution of an ox, pull through either separately ; but both together. Bah ! I can make but little more fun for you, reader. If you want any more of that, shut up the book here, and say good bye. But these midnight walks with him had a strange, unhealthy fascination for me in my present state of mind ; and I continued them.

One night we sat together on the summit of the mountain. The stillness had grown stiller, and the heat had got more intense ; the blessed sea itself, the fresh restless changing sea, was now merely a dull gleaming sheet of copper beneath the blurred and ragged moon ; there was no sound in the long-spread forest, for the rivers were silent in the horrible unnatural heat, and the native dogs were crouched in their lair, urged by an instinct of fear more delicate than our own.

We sat on the grass with our hats off, and our throats bare, for some time in silence ; at last I said,

“ After all you have said on both sides, Trevittick,

you have left me with a confused idea that there is some injustice in the death of Erne and Tom Williams. They were so good and so innocent. What had they done to deserve such a horrible fate?"

We sat without speaking for some time after this. I knew I had offended Trevittick. For him to find all his high-wrought teaching traversed by a commonplace remark of this kind, would, I knew, make him angry. But, God forgive me, I felt what I said. It did seem to me so very, very hard.

I cannot say how long the silence lasted, but suddenly we moved closer together, and tried to seize one another's hands in the dark. For down in the south, among the dim, still forest ranges, we heard the first low mutter of an approaching earthquake.

The sound of it changed from a dull muttering into an angry snarl, and then into a confused jarring roar; but, before it reached us, it had passed into silence, and had only left strange humming echoes in the hot heavy air. The vast mass of trap rock on which we sat, crossing the crack in the earth at right angles had stopped it. We looked hurriedly towards Port Romilly; the rampart of Cape Wilberforce had saved the town. The few lights burnt as steadily as ever.

After a time Trevittick spoke. "The heathenish nonsense you were talking," he said, "before the Lord

rebuked you by shaking the solid earth under your feet, arises from this error,—that the world is the place of rewards and punishments. That is a lie of the devil's. If you believe that, you cannot at the same time believe in the justice of God. You have seen one instance in proof of it, and have rebelled against that. Mind lest God send you another and more terrible one."

I remembered his words afterwards.

"The best man ever I knew was burnt to death, and died in horrible agonies, trying to save a widow's house. You lay *that* to your *heart*; else when the time comes you will most bitterly repent it."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## THE OMEO DISASTER.

POOR Erne! His troubles had very quickly begun. By the time he reached Lake Omeo, he was quite blind with sandblight, and unable to do anything. It was only by degrees that the light broke in upon him, and then the blazing of the great sheets of snow which hung in horizontal lines, or rolled up into gentle curves, round three quarters of the horizon, made him fain to shut them again.

He found that busy Tom Williams had pitched their tent in the deep shade of a group of lightwood trees, on a rising ground overlooking the lake, which began about a hundred and fifty yards from them, and stretched away for five and twenty miles through the beautiful broken country of intermingled forest and lawn, hill and valley which surrounded it. Around on all sides were dark forest-clad mountain ramparts, and above it all the aërial snow downs, traversed



continually with purple shadows of flying summer clouds.

Here they stayed and worked pleasantly enough for a long while. There was gold about in all directions, very fine, but tolerably abundant. They put up troughs on a little stream of water and washed the earth ; it was pleasant cool work, by no means laborious.

There were but few incidents. It got to be a habit with them to watch the snow. To Tom Williams it would have been snow only ; nay, less than snow, only white hills, had he not been with Erne. To the last, I believe, his London *nil admirari* mind hardly appreciated the fact of its really being real cold snow. But there were white hills, and Erne said they were snow, and showed him the beauty of them. Tom noticed that at evening, when the glaring white had turned to a blazing crimson which Mr. Sidney Percy himself could scarcely paint, the light of it shone on Erne's face, as he sat in the door of the tent, and that Erne's face reflected it. And Tom noticed too that, when some travelling thunderstorm would rise up, like the eruption of a volcano, violet black, out of Gippsland, enfold the side of one of the snow downs, and begin tearing at it with continuous snatching claws of lightning, Erne's face would light up, his big eyes would stare, and his handsome mouth would open—only for

a time though, Tom was sorry to see. When the thunder-storm had gone rattling away southward; or when the south wind had come rushing up in his strength, and after a few feeble thunder crackles had dissolved the whole terrible and dangerous combination into thin air, till only one pinnacle of the great ruin hung floating in the sky, disappearing while you looked on it—then Tom Williams noticed that the old weary look came back again, and the eyelids would half close over the eyes, and the mouth would shut once more; and Erne would begin to brood.

Of course Erne was not long before he made a confidant of Tom Williams. It might be indiscreet; but then Tom Williams knew the whole business from beginning to end, and had known it a long time before Erne ever opened his mouth. It is very quaint, the way “the principal party” comes and solemnly tells one in a whisper, with suspicious glances at the door, what one heard a moiety of the assembled county discuss and shelve, at the Pacha’s dinner-table, a week ago last Friday. However, Tom Williams heard the story all over again very many times with the most extreme complacency. “*Toujours perdrix*” is no motto for children or sailors, or the majority of the labouring class. “Let us have ‘Little Red Ridinghood’ to-night, Miss Piminy,” or “Pitch us that yarn about the young

man as cut the young woman's throat and buried her in the sawpit," is the sort of demand generally made on the story-teller of the evening in the nursery, the fore-castle, or the public-house. New stories require frequent repetition to give them the stamp of authenticity. And the "child-mind" is eminently Tory, and suspicious of all fiddle-faddle not believed in by their grandmothers: unless, as in a few instances, it runs into a kind of rampant fiendish whiggery, and asks questions; in which case it must be slapped and put to bed, or the very thunders of Convocation themselves will pass overhead as idle words. Tom Williams was not in the least bored by hearing what he had heard fifty times before. I remember that, as children, we used to demand every night for a long period, at Dieppe, the history of the young lady who used to lose her temper at dominos.

Erne was passionately fond of shooting, and with a view to sport had brought up a large store of gun-powder. All the week they would work, and on Sunday would be away in the forest, or round the lake, shooting,\* getting quantities of wild duck, snipe, quail, and plover. And so the time passed away

\* What an extraordinary fiction it is, that there is no sporting in Australia! The sport there is far better than any which was obtained by Mr. Grantley Berkeley in America, if you leave out his buffalo-shooting.

pleasantly enough, and they got no richer and no poorer, and they were never much too cold or much too hot ; and the sun rose and set, and northed in the winter, and came south again in summer, and all things went so smooth and easy that months seemed like years, and Erne began to feel as though there were no real world beyond those snow-downs. There had been once, but there was none now. His reason told him that all his old friends were alive and well ; yet in his memory the image of James Burton was scarcely more distinct than that of his father. Emma stood by herself still. His intellect would have gone nearly to sleep had it not been for occasional fierce fits of furious jealousy against some unknown man or another, who might be in her company at Palmerston.

Nearly everybody left the place once, to go to Reid's Creek, some 160 miles off, where gold was being found in amazing abundance. There were hardly a hundred people left, and they had such a queer, quiet time of it. Mails were few and far between, and newspapers consequently irregular. The little colony was thrown upon its own resources, and managed wonderfully well. Every one knew every one else, and all called one another by their Christian names. The ladies had their little tiffs. Some's wife fell out with Home's wife about Erne's washing, for instance ; for after their

dissolution of partnership, Erne being unable, like St. What's-his-name, to divide his one shirt a week between them, tossed up a shilling and gave it to Mrs. Somes ; whereupon Mrs. Holmes accused her of soda, and even their husbands did not speak for a fortnight. And sometimes, too, a couple of dogs would fall out ; but the general unanimity was wonderful.

This agreeable state of things was rudely disturbed by Tom Williams and Erne. They moved a small granite boulder in the channel of the stream where they were working, and found in a crevice below about three handfuls of black sand, out of which they washed a pound weight of gold. The news reached Beechworth, of course, in an exaggerated form, and the consequence was that diggers came flocking over in hundreds.

The approaches to Lake Omeo are of fearful difficulty. The men came on foot or on horseback, but the approach with drays in this burning summer time was exceedingly difficult ; the men were there before the provisions, and the consequence was a disastrous retreat, in which the loss of life must have been very great. How great it was we shall never know, but it must have been very great. A man who came into Beechworth on Christmas eve informed me that he himself had found eight young men dead by the Mitta Mitta.

Just as the panic began Erne fell ill. They had no immediate cause for alarm at first, having a considerable quantity of stores by them ; but Erne's illness grew so obstinate that Tom Williams began to get anxious. He never thought of himself. If any one had spoken to him about deserting Erne, Tom would have "pitched into him." He was perfectly willing to stay there and die with Erne, but he was getting anxious, more for Erne's sake than his own. What strange tales one reads of the devotion of men towards one another at such times as these. Read the history of Burke and Wills's expedition. When you read of Wills (last and not least of Devon's worthies) dismissing Burke and King, lest they should lose their lives in seeing him die—when you find that Wills sent these two men from him, and chose a hideous, lonely death, sooner than keep them by him till their last hope of safety was cut off—then you get into a clear high atmosphere of tragedy.

Tom Williams stayed by Erne, patient, gentle, and careful to the last—believing that in doing so he was cutting off his only hope of safety. He saw their provisions dwindling day by day ; he saw Erne getting weaker day by day ; but he sat on and talked cheerfully about old times and people, and he talked the more about them because he began to be fully persuaded that he should never see them again. Erne's beautiful

temper made it easier for him ; but to sit all day in a scorching tent, as the summer settled down over the land like a furnace, watching starvation stalking on towards him,—this was a hard fate for one who was only there by an act of unselfish devotion.

One afternoon Tom, who had not left Erne before that day, went out to talk to one of the few neighbours who were left. Their tents were mostly standing, and he looked into one after another. There was nobody in any one of them. The place was quite silent. He began to feel like a child in a dark room—he began to feel the awful terror of solitude, the terror which expresses itself by hurried glances over the shoulder. He shouted aloud, but the echo of his voice came rattling back to him from among the tree stems. There was no other answer, not even the bark of a dog. The last of the men had gone, and the dogs had followed them ; and poor dying Erne and he were left alone together by the solitary lake, three thousand feet above the sea, and one hundred and sixty miles from the voices of their fellow-men.

Erne had one priceless treasure. He had his "In Memoriam." And, although he knew most of it by heart, yet he loved to see the glorious words on the page, for old fellowship's sake ; for they were dear to him. One night he fell asleep while he was reading it,

and when Tom awoke, he saw that Erne was awake too, and reading again.

"Tom," he said; "I dreamt of my mother last night."

Tom bowed his face in his hands.

"You know what that means?"

Tom knew too well, but said nothing.

"I must die, you see. There is no doubt about it. Now you must make me one solemn promise."

Tom promised him.

"You must take the gun and powder and shot, and try to make Snake Valley. You must leave me."

Tom swore a great oath, which he had no business to do; but then he was a low-born, ignorant fellow.

"You promised," said Erne.

"And I'm going to break my promise. Let's hear no more about it. You are insulting me."

That weary day passed on, and Erne seemed no worse. Just at sunset there came towards the tent, a very wan, lean, wizened little old man, all alone.

"Why, daddy," exclaimed Tom Williams, "we thought you was gone! Where have you been this week?"

"I have been down with the old complaint, and, Lord bless you, I was all alone, and near dying, for I couldn't find my remedy.\* And I lay a week, and was just giving up yesterday, when I bethought me it might

\* Probably opium and catechu.



have dropped behind the bed. And, praise God, there it was, and I am all right this morning, but dreadful weak. Where's the young gentleman?"

"The young gentleman's down with the same complaint. And, God help me," said Tom, with the first burst of tears he had hitherto indulged in, "he's dying!"

"What have you give him?"

"I haven't had anything to give him. Nothing's any good now."

The old man made a gesture of impatience. "Cut away to my tent," he said, "for your legs are nimbler than mine; and look under the head of my bed-place, and you will find an old galvanized iron bucket. And at the top of the bucket you will find a lot of *Melbourne Arguses*, and a pair of gold scales; and take them out careful. And below that you will find a parcel done up in a Sacramento paper; you needn't open that, there's naught in it but a quartz specimen and a Arrapahoe scalp, as I gave six dollars for to one of the pony express; but take it out careful. And then you'll come to a old Bible, and leave that out, young man, for I want it again: I mind of its being uncommon useful twenty-two year ago. And below the Bible you'll find a cigar-box; and open that and you'll find a lock of woman's hair done up in a blue riband, and a lock of boy's hair done up in brown riband. The

woman's hair is black, and the boy's hair is brown, though that aint no odds to you, by the bye. But in that same box you will find a paper parcel, and bring it here. The reason I put it there was that I couldn't die without looking into that box, and so the remedy was better there than elsewhere. Bring it here, but don't go no deeper into that bucket. There's nothing but a lot of ballads and love-letters below that."

How quaint that Australian life is once more—a life's history in an old iron bucket! Not always, however, with another life at the bottom of the bucket, as there was in this case.

The good old man, having ascertained that the worst symptoms had not made their appearance, "exhibited" his remedy, and the symptoms ceased in five hours. There were sufficient provisions left to put Erne on his legs again, and Tom Williams one morning found that an angel, named Hope, had lit down out of the blazing, brazen sky, and was standing before him with sheeny wings, beckoning westward.

There was something utterly unspeakable in the joy that this young workhouse-bred nobleman felt, when he saw Erne take his gun out and shoot a wood-duck. Hope dawned upon him once more. His self-sacrifice had not been in vain. Here in this scorching, beautiful paradise was death. Beyond, lay sweetheart, friends,

and life. Only a hundred and sixty miles between them and Beechworth. Even if he had to carry Erne on his back they *might* do it. They had twelve pounds of flour, some tea, and heaps of powder and shot. Oh for Reuben Burton now ! or one of the Shepherds ! Any of the old Chelsea lot !

As they crossed the great wooded ridge which divided them from the watershed of the Mitta Mitta, they turned and had a last look at the place where they had suffered so much, and which they were never to see again. The lake lay sleeping in the inexorable heat, sometimes dreaming into a fantastic mirage like a nightmare, in which the trees and mountains were horribly inverted. All around, the great snow hills folded in vast ridges ; and there was but one living thing in sight. The old man : a mere speck in the vast scenery which seemed rolling in on all sides, in towering white waves, to overwhelm him—stood there, poor, weak, feeble, alone ; with all the powers of untamed Nature banded against him ; solitary among the dreadful mountains.

That was the last of Lake Omeo. That scene photographed itself upon their brains indelibly.

At first, while the new effect of effort and freedom was upon them, they never doubted of the result : they imagined themselves saved. They shot parrots and cooked them, and fared very well. But the ridges were

steep to climb, and Erne began to flag ; and when they got into the magnesian limestone country, which lies on the left bank of the Mitta Mitta, the water, drawn away underground into infinite crannies and clefts of the rock, begun to fail them ; and they were forced, will they nill they, to struggle down over the cliffs to the river itself, and fight with the tangled jungle on its brink for very life's sake, sooner than keep the high open leading ranges where walking was so much easier, and where the blessed cool south wind from the pole could fan their foreheads, and tell them that the whole of God's earth was not like this blazing, beautiful, cruel, forest land through which they forced their way.

Similar causes will produce similar effects ; and they, starting with just the same knowledge or ignorance of the route to Beechworth, as those who had preceded them, found after a little time that they, driven by the same necessities, had too surely followed on their track.

“The bodies and the bones of those  
That strove in other days to pass,  
Are withered in the thorny close  
Or scattered blanching on the grass.  
He gazes on the silent dead——”

Those who try to prove that Shakespeare was an attorney, had better try to prove that Mr. Tennyson brought up the rear of the great Omeo retreat. There is more evidence for Tennyson than for Shakespeare.

One day—who can say which out of so many weary days?—they came upon the bodies of two young men, brothers, whom they had known on the Omeo, lying locked in one another's arms, on a shelf of limestone by the river. They could not go near them, but they recognised them by their clothes. Erne spoke very little after this, and soon after went mad.

He was not morose or troublesome in his madness. He got first incoherent in his talk, and was apt to astonish Tom Williams by tacking one sentence on to another without the slightest notion of cause and effect. But after this his madness began to get really pretty. He began to be really delirious—that is to say, he began to dream without going to sleep, and to tell his dreams as fast as they came—a very great advantage; for we sane idiots forget half ours as soon as we wake. In short, Erne was talking his dreams as quick as they appeared, and, had there only been a shorthand writer present, we might have had the most wonderful results.


In spite of his madness, though, he walked stoutly onwards. The country through which they walked was one of the richest and most beautiful in the world, but it was not ready for human habitation. It was still in its cruel, pitiless phase. It was only in the state of preparation—a state which it requires generally a great sacrifice of human life to alter into a state of civilization;

it was exceedingly rich, and it looked wonderfully beautiful.

Every morning, great inexorable Mother Nature looked over the eastern hill tops, passing through phases of crimson glory into orange glory, until she had done her day's work, and laid all the magnificent landscape to sleep, under a haze of crystalline blue. And then she would sleep herself; and say dreamily, "Children! children! here is room for millions of you. Come." And then in the evening she would wake up once more, into new glories of crimson and purple, and once more fall asleep into dark night; sighing to herself sometimes, in dry wandering winds, which rustled through the grass upon the thirsty wolds, "Children! children! you have come too soon, and you must die."

The owner of a solitary tent, in one of the furthest and loneliest gulleys at Snake Valley, was lying reading in bed, when he was startled by a shout, to which he answered by another, and an invitation to enter. In a moment a young man stood in the doorway, looking so wan and so wild that the man was startled, and cried out, "Good God, mate, what's the matter?"

"Omeo! water!" was all that Tom Williams could say. The man was out of bed in a moment, and instantly was making towards the water bucket with a pannikin;



but Tom's wolfish eyes followed him, and saw where the water was. He dashed past him, and, with his head in the bucket, drank with long draughts like a horse.

After a fit of giddiness and sickness, he found his voice. "My mate is not three hundred yards back on the track, and I am not sure that he is dead. I carried him the last mile, and laid him down when I saw your light; come, and——" But the man was gone, and, when Tom came up, he found him trying to pour water between the lips of the unfortunate Erne, who lay beneath the tree where Tom had left him—to all appearance dead.

Dead he was not, though, thanks to Tom Williams. Some may say that death is better than life, on the terms on which Erne enjoyed it for a long time after. But life is life, with all its troubles, and death is practically considered by all parties, creeds, and ages, to be a change for the worse; so I suppose that, "humanly speaking," we ought to congratulate ourselves on the fact that Erne Hillyar wasn't dead, and is not dead yet. He had only succeeded in utterly destroying his constitution.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## JAMES BURTON'S STORY.—THE MIDNIGHT MEETING.

THREE nights after the earthquake we were in the same place, at the same hour. The lurid, still weather was the same as before. The terrible threatening silence which hung over the country remained the same. It seemed to me on this night as if that silence would only be broken by the trump of the resurrection ; and I said so to Trevittick.

He took my remark quite *au grand sérieux*, but considered it improbable that the day was near : first, because we had had no portents, nothing but the earthquake and the heat ; and next, because he thought it improbable that he would be allowed to rejoin Tom Williams so quickly—his earthly heart had not been sufficiently weaned from him.

We sat a long time, sometimes talking, sometimes in silence, until I heard a distant sound in the forest, to the south, and called Trevittick's attention to it. He



said, "I have heard it a long time. There are two men walking, and one is lame."

I had as yet made out nothing more than a rustling in the grass, and every now and then the snapping of a stick; but soon I distinguished that two persons were coming through the wood towards us, uphill.

My nerves were unhinged a little by what had happened lately, a little more so by the time and place, and more yet by the awful weather. The moon, though of a ghastly red, shed light enough to distinguish surrounding objects distinctly; and I had a nervous terror of the time when the men who approached should come into the range of sight. I had grown afraid of my own shadow. Trevittick might have had strength of mind to live in the atmosphere of terror which he had created for himself without going mad. I most certainly had not.

I listened with fear as the footsteps approached; and suddenly, before those who made them were in sight, the whole forest echoed with my shout. It was no articulate sound I uttered; it was something like Hah! or Here! The forest took up the echoes and prolonged them, and then silence reigned again. The footsteps had ceased.

"What on earth did you do that for?" said Trevittick.

"You heard the footsteps before me ; but I knew the voice before you. Did you hear him ?"

"I heard a man speak," said Trevittick.

"As I am to be saved by no merits of my own," I said eagerly, "I heard Erne Hillyar's voice. What fools we are ! We are on the very bush track by which Lady Hillyar came from Melbourne. It must be them ; it shall be them !" I cried, raising my voice, "Erne ! Erne ! it is I."

It *was* Erne. There was a feeble shout from below, and we ran down. Before I knew rightly whether my supposition was true or false, I was holding a tall, lean, wan, wasted skeleton of a young man in my arms, and peering into his face. The great blue-black eyes were luminous even in the light of this horrid Hecate of a moon, and the smile was there still. Ah me ! yes, it was Erne in the flesh.

What Trevittick did to Tom Williams I don't know. Punched his head, possibly, for upsetting, by his return, a dozen or fourteen as pretty theories about the future of the departed, as Mr. Emerson and Copeland Advocate, with Dick Swiveller to help them, could have made up in a summer's day. He has never spoken to me on religious subjects since. He had laid his proud heart too bare before me during our solitary walks, when we shared a causeless grief, ever to open it again.

But among all that man's wild feelings in the dark, among all his honest stumblings in the search of truth, one thing he said remains with me yet, and will remain with me until a light not of this world dawns upon my eyes.

"This world is no place of rewards and punishments. You have seen one instance in proof of it, and have rebelled against that. Mind lest He send you another and more terrible one."

## CHAPTER XXV.

## THE LONG COURTSHIP COMES TO AN END.

WHEN the morn dawned, I went and looked at Erne as he lay asleep. He was a terrible ruin. Try to picture to yourself some young round face as it will be when it is old, and you will find it impossible. Again imagine that you have skipped forty years, and met that face again. Would you know it? I should hardly have known Erne.

We had a very clever doctor in Romilly, a man so clever and so *répandu* in his profession, that I have known him fetched by steamer to Melbourne, in what Miss Burke would call "a hurry," to attend important consultations; his expenses and a handsome fee being promised him, and a total immunity against action in civil process being guaranteed him on the honour of the faculty. He had a sympathy with all his patients, inasmuch as he was a prey to a devouring disease himself—that which has been so oddly named, dipso-

mania, as if an addiction to stimulants had anything to do with thirst. This doctor, when sober, (he used to get sober sometimes, as a dissipation, though it played the deuce with his nerves), was a feeble thing, who used to try to dig in his garden ; and was always going to give a lecture ; but when d——. Well, he never was the worse for liquor, generally rather the better—a perfect king. He had attained such a dictatorship in his profession, that his addiction to brandy was looked on as an amiable weakness by the most respectable people. As for the midwives, they none of them felt really safe without Dr. Cobble. It must not be supposed that the doctor ever got drunk.

Mr. Jeaffreson's charming "Book about Doctors" is incomplete. He should add a chapter on colonial doctors.

I sent for this gentleman to see me, and waited with intense impatience till he came out, for the change in Erne was so great that I had a vague fear that he would die. The weary lassitude, the utter absence of all energy, moral or physical, was so great that I thought it more than probable that he might fail, and die after all.

So I waited for the doctor with great anxiety ; and at last he came out. I could gather nothing from his face, and I knew him too well to suppose that I should

get anything out of him until I had given him his run ; so I had to sit and wait as patiently as I could to the latest instalment of gossip. But I got him some brandy, hoping that would soften his heart, and persuade him to put me out of my misery. If Erne should die after having been restored to us, and if Emma, after hearing of his life, should hear once more of his death, I almost feared that she would die too. For many reasons was I anxious.

The doctor began. "Lady and baby quite well, hey ? Well done. Now don't begin chaffing about Diver's horse. Don't."

I said I wouldn't, and I meant it, for I hadn't a notion what *he* meant. I knew that Diver's real name was Morecombe, that there had been a sort of murrain among his uncles and aunts, and that he had gone home, exceedingly drunk, as heir apparent to an earldom ; but nothing more.

But the story about Diver's horse struck the doctor as being too good not to be told, and it is not a bad story either, though I am not going to tell it, as did the doctor. The story of Diver's horse led up to the story of Dickenson's aunt, which I shan't tell either, because I have forgotten all about it, but I remember it to have been tragic ; and this story led to the story of Dickenson's niece, which was funny ; and to that of Horton's

brother, which was improper. When he had done laughing I put my question to him most earnestly, and he grew serious at once, and answered me.

"There is great mischief: what we call in our loose language, 'a shock to the system.' There is a nasty tympanitic action of the viscera, arising from starvation, giving rise to very distressing symptoms, which I can mend in a fortnight; but I fear that there is a nervous disorder too, a want of vital energy, which not all the doctors—drunken or teetotal—in Australia could mend if they did their *et cæteraest*, and which I must leave to you, and to some one else, I strongly suspect. I hope there will be no fresh shock or disappointment. If you can, if you love your friend, prevent *that*. He won't *die*, I'll go bail for it, but—that man Hillyar has scrofula in his family somewhere."

I eagerly said that such was not the case.

"Pish!" said the doctor. "Don't tell me. Now the muscles of his face are relaxed he shows his teeth like a hare. I say, Burton, have you looked at your barometer?"

"Why?"

"Because mine is drunk."

To get rid of him I took him to see mine in the hall. When he looked at it, he exclaimed,—

"By George, yours is drunk too! Good night. Take an old man's advice, and don't whistle for the next fortnight, not even to call your dog; unless you want the shingles about your ears."

It was but little I cared for barometers that night. I had firm faith in the doctor (indeed I was right in that), and it seemed to me that I held Erne's fate in my hand. I sat with him for half an hour, and then left him with a new light in his eyes; for I had told him, in my rough language, that Emma loved him as dearly as ever; that Joe was to be married, and that she considered that another had relieved her of her watch over him; and that, when she had believed him dead, she had bitterly repented of her treatment of him. She had said to me, I told him, in the silence of the summer's night,—

"My brother, I acted from vanity. Don't raise your hand and say No. Be honest, brother. At first, as a child, I thought I saw my way to what all true women love,—a life of self-sacrifice. But, when the necessity for it was gone, as far as regarded our poor deformed brother, the necessity still remained with me; because in my vanity and obstinacy I had *made* it a necessity. I had determined that my life should be sacrificed as a girl; and, when as a woman I found that sacrifice unnecessary, I felt, God forgive me, disappointed. I



did not sin at first. My sin only began with my obstinacy ; when I began to sacrifice his future to my old dream of staying by poor Joe, and taking the place of a wife to him. Until I saw that that dream was nothing but a dream, and that I was unfit for the task I had undertaken, I had not sinned. But now I know my sin. I have driven the best man I have ever met to despair, and I am reaping the fruits of it by Joe's carelessness of me. Oh, if Erne would come back again, brother ! Oh, if he would only come back again !"

The *Wainoora* was going south the next day, and I sat up and wrote the following letter :—

"DEAREST SISTER,—Erne is not dead, but has come back to us, broken in health, but alive.

"I say nothing of a confidence between us two the night before I was married. I say nothing of *that*. I only call your attention to this ; your old causes for refusing Erne were these,—that you must sacrifice your life to Joe ; and that you would never drag Erne down to your level by marrying him.

"Both these causes are removed. Joe is now one of the leading men in the colony, and is going to marry this beautiful, wealthy Mrs. North. You are now the great Burton heiress, and Erne, a broken man, is lying

in my veranda, looking south, towards the sacred land in which you live.

"Surely, dear sister of my heart, your life's work lies here now. I do not urge on you the fact that I know you love him as well as ever, and that I know no one has stepped in between you two. I only say that mere consistency has absolved you from your resolution, that from a mere sense of duty you ought to hear him plead once more."

I was on board the *Wainoora* early in the morning, with this letter. The commander, Captain Arkwright, was a great friend of mine, and, in defiance of post-office regulations, I entrusted it as a private parcel to his hands. "Give it to her yourself, old fellow," I said, "and get the answer from her. How soon shall you be back?"

"I'll give it to her," he said, "and I'll get an answer from her. With regard to being back, why, ten days." "Ten days, my good sir!" I exclaimed.

"Ah! ten days, my good sir," he answered. "Yes, and eleven with the barometers all drunk—aneroid, as well as mercurial. I want sea room, I do; I shall run out pretty nigh to New Caledony, to see the French sogers a-drilling. If I make this port under eastern by south next trip, with this dratted mercury sulking down,

by Reid and Maury, I hope I may be made harbour-master of Cape Coast Castle."

He was a good sailor. He was one of those sailors one gets to love by watching them as they, with steadfast faces, hurl their ship through that mad imbroglio which we call a "gale of wind." But he was wrong in this instance. He was back under ten days, and steamed into the bay on a sea so glassy calm, that the ripple of a shark could be seen a mile off, and little following waves, raised by his screw, lived nearly half an hour before they died away upon the face of the waters.

But the melancholy landscape, and the luridly still weather grew bright, fresh, and pleasant to me as I read her letter. There was no barrier between the two, whom, after my wife, I loved best on earth. It was all over now, and a bright, hopeful future in the distance :—

"DEAR BROTHER,—God has been better to me than I deserve. It shall be as he and you wish. If he holds to his mind, let him wait for me in your veranda. If he is not there I shall know that I have tried his patience too long, and shall pray that he will learn to forgive me.

"I will return to you by the *Wainoora*. I would have come this trip, but there is sad trouble here, and

I am wanted. It is not trouble about Joe, or about any one whom you love; so do not be alarmed. Lady Hillyar is better, and I thought that I was free; but it has pleased God to find me more work. If it had been work which I could have delegated to any one, even to that blessed saint Miss Burke, I would have done so. But it so happens that no one can do it but myself, and the salvation of an immortal soul is too important a thing to be trifled with. So I have not come this trip, but must wait for the next. I cannot leave my charge until I place her in the hands of my mother.

“May God shower His choicest blessings on all your heads! I hope Fred has not run away from school again. If he has, kiss him for me, and tell him he must not be so naughty. Kiss dear father and mother for me. And so, good-bye, dear brother of my heart; when we next meet, my face will be so radiant with unutterable happiness, that you will scarcely know me. Good-bye.”

The *Wainoora* went south over the great glassy sea, and we began to watch for her return. From my veranda you could see over the forest, and over the bay as far as Cape Pitt, thirty miles off. We sat down and watched for the smoke of the steamer, whose

advent was to bring our life's history to an end, at least as far as it need be spoken of. The "laws of fiction" show us, clearly and without argument, that a man's life ceases at marriage.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## EMMA IS DETAINED.

THE "Theatre Royal" Palmerston, or as a miserable and effete Squattocracy (with their wretched aping of the still more miserable and effete aristocracy of the old world, says our friend Mr. O'Callagan) chose to call it, "The Opera house," is arranged on strictly democratic principles.

What the actors call in their quaint self-satisfied slang, "the house," as if the normal destination and mission of bricks and mortar were to form the walls of a theatre, was entirely arranged for the comfort of the great unwashed. The galleries contained more than one half of the audience; and, whether the heavy father gave his blessing, or, the young lady driven to despair by the unprincipled conduct of the British officer, uttered a touching sentiment (said British officer in private life being generally a gentle and kind being,

with stores of knowledge about foreign parts, which he is shy of imparting to you for fear of boring you; mostly having a hobby, such as ornithology or chess; a man who, if he gets to like you, is always preternaturally anxious to introduce you to his mother)—whether, to resume the thread of this most wonderful paragraph, the first tragedian made a point and stopped short, refusing to fulfil his engagement, until the audience had brought their grovelling souls to appreciate the fact; whether the villain of the piece, and his more villainous creature, after discharging accusatory sentences at one another, made like pistol-shot, suddenly stalked across the stage and changed places (and that is the deepest mystery in theatrical ethics); whether the first comedy lady said “Heigh ho” in her lover’s absence exactly as we do in private life; or her waiting-maid was “arch,” and took up her apron by the corners, when “rallied” about her *penchant* for the groom; in short, whatever of the old time-honoured balderdash was done on the stage, it was addressed to the galleries.

For the same democratic reasons, the large hall, which formed the crushroom of the theatre, had drinking-bars erected in it, both on the ground-floor, and in the galleries which run round overhead; and this vestibule was not only common to the galleries, which were filled

with the lowest population of the town ; the dregs of the offscourings of Great Britain and Ireland ; but was also used by Messrs. Pistol and Co., with the dozen or fourteen gentlewomen from Mrs. Quickly's old establishment ; who, having nothing to pay for entrance, and as much to drink as they could get the cattle dealers and diggers to treat them to ; made the hall a sort of winter garden ; and did so amble and giggle, and mince and flounce, and say things, that the Haymarket at one o'clock in the morning after the Derby, was not more hideous and revolting than the hall of the Opera house at Palmerston. There is one thing certainly which we of Great Britain, Ireland, and our off-shoots and dependencies, do in a manner with which no other nation can compete. We exhibit our vice and dissipation with a loathsome indecency which no other group of nations seem to have rivalled. It may be for the best, but it is very ugly.

A little bird has told me that Huskisson Street, Palmerston, and Bourke Street, Melbourne, have been purged with a high hand ; though it is still impossible to walk down the Haymarket—and that the class who have been instrumental in doing this are the mechanics—the respectable mechanics who wished to take Mrs. and Miss Mechanic to hear Catherine Hayes, without having their ears polluted by the abominable language



of the Haymarket and Newgate combined. If this be so, which I think highly probable, it is a fact for a certain party, to which they are welcome. If all mechanics were like the Burtons, three cheers for the six-pounders.

But this arrangement prevailed in the time I speak of both at Palmerston and Melbourne. It was difficult for any lady to get to her carriage without being insulted several times ; either by the dozen or fourteen gentlewomen, or by that strange young cad in knee-breeches and boots, who carries a whip, but never crossed a horse ; who, I fancy, is generally some two-penny-halfpenny clerk, who gets himself up like a fancy stock-rider to give himself a bush flavour. Consequently, when Mrs. Oxton and Emma Burton had stood for a quarter of an hour at the bottom of the staircase which leads down from the dress-boxes, they began to think how they were to get through the disgraceful, drunken crowd before them, and to wish that Mr. Oxton and Joseph Burton, who had promised to come for them, had not been detained so late at the houses ; the more particularly as they had brought poor silly Lady Hillyar out, for the first time, that night, and she, feeling tired, was insisting on sitting on the stairs, and playing draughts on the squares of the oilcloth with the blossoms out of her bouquet.

"What shall we do, dear?" said Mrs. Oxton to Emma.

Said Gerty, who was as eminently practical as Mrs. Micawber, the most so when most cracked, "Send the box-keeper to tell them that if they use any more language, we'll have the triangles out, and give them half a hundred apiece."

Emma did not know what to do just then. She was rather glad of the pause, for she had been crying, and perhaps was quietly crying still. Her brother James's letter, telling her that Erne had come back alive, had not reached her yet. Lady Hillyar was so much better, that she had forgotten her crazy jealousy against her sister and brother-in-law, and had received them with affectionate penitence. So Emma's work was done in that quarter, and her old grief had come on her again, demanding some diversion. Very soon she found such diversion, and cried no more; but now she was low and tearful, for the play, and what followed it, had upset her.

Catherine Hayes had been singing *Norma* so carefully, so diligently, and with such exquisite feeling, that one dared not say that there were any notes of which she was not quite mistress, high up in her glorious gamut. The ill-behaved, ill-educated audience had encored her until she was weary, but she had always

come back and had done her best for them, until she was quite weary. When it was all over, they called her before the curtain ; but this was not enough for them. She was going to Sydney the next day, and from thence to England, and a loud and universal cry gathered and grew through the theatre, "Last night, Kate ! last night ! A song ! a song !"

In one of the pauses of the clamour a voice was heard—"One more song for the honour of Old England."

Another voice, which few failed to recognise for that of Mr. O'Callagan, was heard from pit to gallery,—

"It's little music of that kind that ye'll get out of dirthy ould England. One more song, darlin', for the love of ould Ireland !"

Whether the old music of her native dialect was too much for her, or whether she was a little *tête montée* with the long and enthusiastic applause, we cannot say, but she came before the curtain, and, without the orchestra, in her dress as *Norma*, amidst a silence that could be felt, she broke out with the most beautiful, if I may decide, of all Moore's ballads, "The Last Rose of Summer."

Towards the close of each verse, the godlike voice went sweeping through the airy fields of sound like a lark upon the wing, till it paused aloft in a wild melan-

choly minor, and then came gently down like the weary bird, dropping, tired, sad with too much joy, to his nest amidst the corn.

"You might have heard a pin drop," to use an old figure of speech. Not only did she feel every word of what she was singing, but the hand of death was upon her, and she not only knew it herself, but made her audience, wild and uneducated as they were, understand that she was to be listened to now, not as *Norma* in Italian, but as Catherine Hayes in Irish. She was gone before the applause burst out.

"The wild swan's death-note took the soul,  
Of that waste place with joy."

And Emma, overcome by that strange, wild wail, had hardly recovered herself before she was, with Mrs. Oxton and Lady Hillyar, at the bottom of the stairs, Lady Hillyar, playing chess with flowers, and Mrs. Oxton, saying, "My dear, how ever shall we get to our carriage?"

Something to do. For that quietly diligent soul, anything was better than inaction. Partly from old, old habit, and partly because she had found lately that the old habits of activity and self-sacrifice were the best antidote for sorrow, she had got into the way of doing without hesitation the first thing that presented itself to her hand. It was only forcing her way through a

crowd of drunken blackguards just now : but it led to fresh work, heavy work too, as we shall see.

" I'll go, dear Agnes," she said to Mrs. Oxton ; " their language is nothing to me ; I was brought up among it. Stay here and watch Gerty, and I will go and see after the carriage."

She pulled her opera cloak about her, drew herself up, set her mouth, and launched herself on the sea of low dissipation which lay before her.

The presence of such a proud, imperial figure as this blacksmith's daughter ; protesting against these Comus revels, with her calm, high-bred, beautiful face, and with the atmosphere of purity and goodness, which shone about her head like the glory of a saint ; produced an immediate effect—an effect so great that, had she carried the flaming sword of an angel in her hand, she could scarce have made her way more effectually. The men made room for her, and pulled those who had not noticed her approach, out of her way. The miserable women who were mixed with them stayed their babble and were silent, as she passed down the lane which had been opened for her. Some, with evil, lowering faces, scowled on her, as though they would have said, " You may come to be the same as we, my fine lady, some day, curse you ;" some, flippant and silly, were only silent because the others were silent, and waited

to resume their silly tattle till she had gone by: and some,—ah, the weary day—felt the blood rush up over their worn, hectic features, and said, “Time was when we might have been as she is; but the grave is cold, and hell is beyond it.”

But Emma, passing among these women, seemed to create an atmosphere of silence. She knew the world, she knew how these women lived, and what they were; and her heart was pitiful towards them, and swelled until her great eyes grew larger and prepared themselves for tears. But the tears never came; for before her was a knot of the devil’s tying, which would not untie itself at her mere presence: an imbroglio which had raised the passions of the bystanders from mere prurient frivolity, into ferocious attention. There was a crowd which would not dissolve before her, and from the centre of it came the shrill, horrible sound of two desperate women quarrelling.

She caught sight of Miss Burke at the other side of the crowd. She understood in an instant that that most indefatigable of friends had come back to their assistance, and she waved her hand to her, and pointed to the staircase where were Aggy and Gerty: the next moment, by a surge in the crowd, she was thrust near enough to the women who were quarrelling to see the whole thing. For one moment her heart sank within

her, and she grew faint, and tried to turn ; but in the next her resolution was taken, and, muttering a short prayer to herself, she began to force her way towards the two unfortunate combatants.

“She may be saved yet. Oh God, have mercy on her.”

She might well say so. In a ring before her ; in a ring of faces—stupid, idle, brutish, curious, cunning, silly, devilish—stood Mrs. Clayton, once pretty Polly Martin, once Mrs. Avery—and Mrs. Quickly, face to face at last. Masks torn off, all concealment thrown to the winds, baring the hideousness of their previous lives to the ribald bystanders in hot, hissing words, too horrible to be repeated.

They had assaulted one another it seemed ; for poor Mrs. Clayton’s bonnet was off her head, and her still splendid hair was gradually falling down loop by loop as she shook her head in cursing Mrs. Quickly. As for Mrs. Quickly, not only was her bonnet gone, but her decorous, grey, matronly front, an expensive article, manufactured for her own consumption, also ; and she stood with her wicked old head nearly bare, and her beautiful long white fingers opening and shutting like a cat’s claws.

“Come on,” she cried, “you devil. I’m an old woman, but I’m good for a scrimmage with such as you still. Come on.”

Hush ! If you want this sort of thing, go to the places where it is to be seen for yourself. We are going a far different road.

Before Mrs. Quickly had half finished her turn of evil words—before her wicked old tongue had half wearied itself with the outpourings of her wicked old heart—Emma had pushed her way into the circle, had taken Mrs. Clayton round the waist, and had said, “Polly, dear, come home with me ;” and the wretched woman had fallen crying on Emma’s bosom, and had let herself be led away. This was the more easily accomplished, as a singular diversion had been made, and the crowd had been in serious hopes of another row. Mrs. Quickly had found herself suddenly confronted with Miss Burke, who stood grand, majestic, and scornful before her, and who said in a sharp, snarling voice, without one trace of “brogue”—

“Not another word, you wicked old wretch. That woman’s sins are known to me and to God ; her efforts at repentance are known to me and to God also. And I and God know also how you came between her and salvation—how you wound yourself into her house, held the knowledge of her former life over her head, and drove her once more into her old habits. I think that, if I were to tell this crowd the truth—how in a drunken squabble you laid her whole past life bare



before her husband ; not because it could do any good, but out of spite—this crowd, composed even of such as it is, would tear you to pieces. Get home, you miserable old woman, and try to repent.”

Mrs. Quickly undid her gown at the throat, and gasped for breath ; then she shook her hands to and fro loosely, as though she was playing the tambourine ; clutched her hair wildly, drummed with her heels, bit her fingers, and took a short run with her arms over her head ; stopped and moaned ; then took a longer and more frantic run, and hurled herself down in the gutter outside, and there lay kicking. An unappreciative world this ! She was fished out of that gutter, as a mere drunken woman, by an utterly unsympathetic constabulary, who could not be brought to an appreciation of her wrongs, but took her as a piece of business—an unexpected order, troublesome to execute and unremunerative, but coming into their weary day’s work. A most bitter and hard-hearted world !

By the time she had done all this, so well had the retreat been covered by Miss Burke, Emma had got her unresisting charge safe away, and had very soon landed her in her own house. At first Mrs. Clayton only cast herself on the ground, with her face hidden, moaning ; but after a time her moans grew articulate, though monotonous. “Let me go and make

away with myself ! Let me go and make away with myself ! ”

Emma knelt beside her on the floor, but the poor woman only shrunk from her touch, and went on with the same low wail. At last Emma tried praying, and that quieted her ; till by degrees she let Emma’s arm steal round her waist, and she laid her burning head upon Emma’s bosom, and began in wild starts and with long interruptions to tell her tale.

“ She found me out as soon as I married him. I thought that, when I married, my whole hideous life was a thing of the past. I did not think how wickedly I was deceiving him. I thought it was all past and gone for ever. I had tried so hard, and had repented so sincerely, that I thought some mercy would have been shown me ; but, when she found me out at the end of the three months, I knew that I was to be punished for my deceit, and that he, poor innocent—my poor old Jack ; my poor, kind, loving, innocent, old Jack—oh, my God ! I’ll tear the hair out of my head—that he was to be punished through me. And she tempted me to the drink ; and I was glad of it, for I had a horrible life, never knowing what she would say or do. And she would sit opposite me half the day with her arms folded, magging and growling at me—at me who was always so kind to her, and never offended her ; and she would play with my

terror as a cat plays with a mouse ; and oh ! she is a devil ! devil ! devil ! ”

“ Hush, dear, hush ! ”

“ I used to wish her dead, Emma. I used to wish that I dared murder her ; but I saw that servant-girl hung at Bristol, and that stopped me. I tried to keep civil to her, but I could not do it. We had many quarrels, and I knew how dangerous quarrelling was, and vowed each one should be the last. But when the drink was in me I used to break out. And last week we had the finishing quarrel. I broke out at her, and called her such dreadful things that she sat white with savageness, and then got up and went to the room where *he* was. I saw that she was going to tell him, but I was too wild to stop her ; I threw the worst word of all at her as she went. And then I saw him go riding across the plain with his head bowed down ; and then she came back and told me that she had told him ; and that he had taken down the Testament and had sworn that he would never, never see me again. ”

Emma started suddenly, and clenched her hand. It would have been ill for Mrs. Quickly to have seen the look of withering scorn and anger which flashed from her beautiful face as the poor woman spoke that last sentence ; but she said not one word.

“ And so I got my horse and rode away here. And

she followed me, and I met her again and did not kill her. And she got me to go to where you found me; because she said he was going to the play with another woman. And once I caught her eye, and knew by her wicked leer that she was lying to me about him, and then I fell upon her and tried to tear her treacherous old heart out."

"Hush, dear," said Emma once more. "That woman got you to go to that dreadful place in order to compromise your character again;" and the poor woman grew quieter once more.

"And I shall never, never see him any more," she went on moaning; "and I love him, love him with the whole of my rotten heart. And he will shudder when he hears my wretched name. And he loved *me* once. Oh, my God!"

"He loves you still, my poor Mary," said Emma. "That wicked woman has utterly deceived you. Both Miss Burke and I heard from him this morning, begging her, because she is never behind in a good work, and me, because I have known you ever since I was a child, to search you out, and tell you that he forgives you, all, everything, and loves you the same as ever. That he will cherish you through life, and lie in the same grave with you in death."

The poor thing only turned over on the ground again,

and fell to moaning once more. "Oh, I daren't see his face again. I shall die if he looks at me. Oh, let me go and make away with myself! If you leave me alone, I will go and make away with myself."

So Emma stayed with her; and on the third day, like a great illuminating blaze of lightning, came her brother James's letter. Erne was not dead, and loved her still.

She would have gone to him at once, but the brooding figure before her appealed to her too strongly. Mrs. Clayton asked humbly to be taken to Mrs. Burton when she was well enough to move, and prayed Emma not to leave her. She was not safe alone, she said. So that Emma waited for the next voyage of the *Wainoora*, as we already know from James Burton's story.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY.—CAPTAIN ARKWRIGHT GOES  
BACK ONCE MORE.

So the *Wainoora* went south again over the calm sea, and Erne and I sat in the veranda, waiting for her return.

"In any other quarter of the world," said Captain Arkwright to me in the billiard-room the night before she sailed, "we should have had a gale of wind after all this brooding weather, and this low mercury. I made sure of it last trip ; but, since you have told me of this earthquake, which you and Trevittick felt beyond the hill, I am getting less cautious. *That* is what is the matter ; that is what is lowering the barometer so, and making this God-forsaken weather. It was just the same at Pernambuco" (he *said* Pernembooker) "five years ago, and at Valparaiso" (he *said* Walloparaiser) "when I was a boy ; the time when I was cook's mate's master's mate in that—never you mind," he went on, a

little sulkily, though I had not spoken—"that aint no odds to you. You was only a smith yourself once, you know. And we must all on us have a beginning, of some sort or another. Even dukes and marquises, as I understand, has to serve their time as earls and barons, and learn their duty, before the Queen will rate them as A. B. By-the-bye, did your night-shift in the mine feel it?"

"They *heard* it plain enough," I answered, "and stampeded; but, when they came back, the candles were all burning, and not so much as a handful of dust had fallen."

"These Australian earthquakes are very partial," said Captain Arkwright; "but law! you don't know what may happen. Well, I'll bring Miss Burton back to you as quick as I can. I like having that woman on board my ship; it is as good as fifty underwritings. I'd go through Torres Straits and chance losing my insurance, if I had her aboard."

"She likes the sea, skipper," I said; "at least she has taken to like it since she sailed with you."

"Well, now, that's true; though I am afraid you are learning the bad habits of the upper orders, gentleman Jim, and mean a compliment."

"So I did, skipper," I retorted. "And, if you are going to be nasty about it, you shall have it hot and

heavy. I'd sooner sail with you than with any sailor I ever saw. For you are out-and-out the best company—leave alone the best sailor—and one of the best fellows I ever knew. Now, then. Come. You've got a deal by growling."

"Shut up! shut up! shut up!" said the skipper. "I told you you were getting corrupted. But I say, old fellow," he continued, lowering his voice, "tell us, is there anything between her and Mr. Hillyar?"

"She is going to marry him, that is all," I said, in a triumphant whisper.

"Hoo-ray!" said the skipper. "I knew there was some one, from her always staying so late on deck, and watching the coast; and from her standing alone, an hour together, and looking at the engine; and from her beautiful talk to me about the sea-birds, and the islands, and such like; but I never knew who it was. No man is worthy of her, that's one thing."

"*He* is," I answered.

"I'm glad to hear it," said the skipper. "Lord bless you! *I* see it all, and so did my wife, the very last trip she came with us, my wife being abroad with the young uns for air. It was blowing pretty nigh guns, sou'-eastern by east, off shore; and when, we come to the harbour's mouth, there was Tom Wyatt, with his pilot just aboard, beating in with railway iron, and an assorted lot from



London, in that — the *Storm Cloud*. I don't want to be vulgar. I never *am* vulgar before I am three-quarters tight, but that ship was, and is, a canine female which neither I nor no other pilot in the harbour could ever get about without swearing at her till the rigging frayed out through the pitch. I don't want to bear hard on her builder, nor no other man. But for laying that ship to, in a gale of wind, why, I wish he'd do it himself. That he is the best shipbuilder in the world, I don't deny ; but why Providence picked me out to take that earliest experiment of his into harbour the first month of my appointment and risk my certificate, I shall never know. Well, as I was saying, Tom hails me to take him on board, and give him a cast up the harbour, for God's sake. And I, knowing what he was so mad about, knowing that he had left his wife a year ago, three months gone, slacked and sent a boat for him ; for all his'n were gone, in a cyclone off Kerguelen's Land, he having took to sail by Maury, and having made southing. And my lads (you know the sort *I* sail with) had the boat in before five minutes were gone, though I didn't half like it ; for the whale-boat that had put his pilot on board had been devilish near swamped, and was making rather bad weather of it to leeward. However, he got into our dingy somehow, and I was thinking how the deuce we should get him on board, when your

sister comes up to me, with the speaking-trumpet in her hand, and she says,—“Captain Arkwright, put him out of his misery. Think what it would be to you, if you were uncertain whether those you loved best on earth were alive or dead.’ And I see what she meant, though I had intended to wait till he got on board. So I takes the trumpet and I hollers, ‘She is all right, and the kid, too.’ And we seen him, my wife and me and your sister, bend down over the thwart with his face in his hands: and then I knew that your sister was right. And he came aboard, Lord knows how, and had a wash and a shave, and tried to eat his breakfast, but couldn’t.”

I recognised my sister’s hand here, most entirely, and I told him so, but he went on with his narrative.

“And when I went to my cabin, my wife says to me, ‘She’s got it,’ and I said, ‘Who’s got it?’ ‘Emma Burton,’ she says. And I said, ‘What’s she got, the rheumatis?’ And she said, ‘You needn’t be a fool, for you know what I mean well enough. *She’s got it*, and all I hope is that he is worthy of her, that is all—nothing more. I hope he may be worthy of her.’ No, Jim, we knew there was some one, but we never knew who it was.”

And with such discourse we wiled away the night with that curious and occasionally pleasant disregard of

night and day, which is only to be found among working sailors and young ladies who are dancing with a view to matrimony. I have forgotten as much of the art of navigation as I once knew, but I have a hazy idea still, in this year 1865, that the first dog-watch is coincident with supper time. Don't ask me for any moral reflection on this point ; and, as for making fun just now, why men have made fun in strange places. Instance Sir Thomas More, our old Chelsea friend, for one.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## THE CYCLONE.\*

ON the sixth day after the departure of the steamer, the dull, close, brooding weather came to an end. Arkwright was wrong. It was the dread pause before the hurricane.

At eleven o'clock in the morning Erne and I were standing together at the fence at the lower end of my garden, looking across the bay, when our attention was attracted to a vivid green cloud approaching with horrible rapidity from over the sea ; and at the same time we became aware of a dull roar which grew upon the ear each moment. Before we had at all appreciated the dreadful disaster which had fallen upon the unfortunate town, I saw the first house struck by the wind fall crashing over after half a minute's resistance, an utter ruin, the shingles and weather-boards, which had composed it, flying before the blast like chips of cardboard.

\* "Black Thursday."

'Instantly, or it seemed to us instantly, we were thrown headlong down, bruised and terrified ; and the wind, seizing the earth, raised an atmosphere of flying stones and sand to a height of some six feet from the ground, which followed its course, as it seemed to us, with the rapidity of a projectile, and lacerated our hands and faces until the blood ran from them.

I raised myself as well as I could, holding on by the post of the garden gate, and looked toward my house, expecting to see it in ruins ; but close as it was I could not see it, for the unnatural driving fog which was between me and it. A fog of stones, and dust, and sticks, and boughs ; nay, even as we found afterwards, of seaweed, which must have been carried above a mile ; and fierce stinging rain, which I thought was from above, but which was only the spray blown from the surface of the ocean, a mile off. Through this I forced my way to the house, shouting for my wife, expecting to find only a heap of ruins, in which I must dig to recover the mutilated bodies of my dear ones. But it was standing safe. Emma's good taste in persuading me to leave the box forest, standing round it, had saved us. The windward trees were blown in on those inside, which were still standing, and tangled with them into a screen which even the hurricane could not penetrate, and which left my house in comparative calm ; so much so, that it

became the hospital of the town. I cannot help remembering now, as a noticeable fact, that the whole thing was so strange, so beyond experience, that my wife, though deadly pale, and too frightened to show her fright, *had not the least idea of what had happened*. When I explained to her that it was the wind, she did not understand me.

Erne forced his way into the house, and we three stood staring at one another. I was the first to look out at the door, and the first thing I saw was the newly-built wooden church disappearing, board by board, shingle by shingle, as if with an invisible fire. The thought of my father and mother came over me with a shock, and I dashed out of the house, and sped away towards their house—not two hundred yards away—down the wind. I was blown over and bruised in an instant. Now I was up, now I was down again; now trying to stop and see where I was going, and now falling headlong over some heap of incongruous ruin, already half piled over with a heap of fuming sand.

This was the house. These three corner posts, standing still against the wind, and that heap of rubbish lying to leeward, already burning fiercely with a lurid, white heat, at the edge where it was smitten by the wind. But, thank God, here they were, safe and sound—my mother crouched behind a rock, and my father bending over her;

the dear old gentleman with his coat off, trying to shield her sacred head from the furious tornado.

We had to wait for a lull. How we got back over that two hundred yards I don't know, more than that my father and I struggled on first, arm-in-arm, dragging her behind us, with a shawl passed round her waist : but we got there somehow. Martha, with the child, the two maids, and my groom, were all standing close together near the door, silent and terrified at the horrible shrill yell of the wind ; like infinite millions of voices, all fiercely crying out the same words. I saw that Erne was standing by the fire-place, but I knew that his thoughts were the same as mine ; so I dared not look at him, for fear of seeing my own fear look at me out of his eyes.

The storm raged on, how long I cannot say, nor can I say whether we were silent all the time, or whether we talked incessantly. But at the end of some period a figure stalked in through the door and confronted us.

Trevittick, bareheaded, bloody, in his shirt and trousers only. To my London mind, so jealous of any departure from my own particular conventionalism, Trevittick always appeared more than half mad. On the present occasion, it occurred to my excited brain that, if all the devils which possessed the Gadarene swine had entered into the most hopeless lunatic in

Tyre or Sidon, he would have looked uncommonly like Trevittick, as he came hurling in out of the wild witch Sabbath of the winds, which was tormenting the terrified earth without. And, upon my word, I believe I am right; a Jew or a Cornish Phœnician can look wonderfully mad on the slightest occasion. But I succumbed to Trevittick after this. I never accused him of being mad any more.

"What are you doing here?" he said, in a loud, angry growl. "Four able-bodied men here in a place of safety, among the women, on such a day of wrath as this! Do you know that the town is destroyed and on fire, and I who have been expecting to hear the last trump sound every day for I know not how long, come back from my work and find you hiding here. Cowards, come on!"

We went out at once with him into the gale—Erne and my groom first. My father and I followed with Trevittick.

"Trevittick," said my father, pausing behind a rock. "you are in one of your moods. Drop it a bit, old chap, and answer me a question or two. Will this storm extend very far?"

"My dear Mr. Burton," said Trevittick, in quite another tone, "I cannot say for another hour or two; if the wind shifts rapidly, we may hope that the diameter of the storm is small. If it holds in the same quarter



long we may conclude that the diameter is greater. But it is impossible to say whether the wind is shifting yet ; I cannot decide for another two hours, but I like the look of these lulls, and this sudden violence, I confess."

\* "But, in God's name, what do you *think* of it, Trevittick ?"

"I don't like it altogether," said Trevittick ; "the preparation was so long. The same weather and height of mercury was reported from Palmerston by Arkwright. I must tell the truth, Mr. Burton ; I cannot lie. It looks to me like a 1783 business."

"Now, Trevittick," said my father, "we are both driving at the same point. Speak the word for me—I dare not speak it myself."

"The *Wainoora* ?"

"Ah !"

"I *hope* she is in the lee of the Bird Islands—I *hope* so ; she *may* be."

"Then do you think she has sailed ?" said my father.

"She sailed," said Trevittick, taking my father's arm, and speaking slowly, "on the 11.30 flood on Wednesday. If she didn't, take my shares and get a new manager. Arkwright was deceived about the weather and the mercury. I, loving you and yours, calculated every chance, as you see. I was deceived too, for I got it

into my head that the Lord was coming, in clouds of glory, with all His angels around Him. Angels and Archangels, and all the company of glorified saints, with crowns of gold—stop me, stop me!—you spoke of the *Wainoora*!”

“Ay, the *Wainoora*, old friend,” said my father, quietly.

“And the sea gave up her dead!” replied Trevittick, wildly throwing his hands over his head; “and they cast down their golden crowns!—hush—I’ll be still directly. The town’s a-fire, and that has excited me; I haven’t got your dull Saxon blood, you know. The *Wainoora*?—why she may have got to the leeward of the Bird Islands. That is our chance. But don’t anticipate. Keep Mr. Hillyar at work, and work yourself. Don’t think of it.”

And, indeed, there was little time to think; for the town was a heap of ruins, which began to blaze up more strongly as the wind partially lulled. Scarcely any house in the great straggling village had been without a fire of logs when the wind smote it, and the flimsy wooden houses—their materials dried to the extreme pitch of inflammability—had been blown down on these fires; and each domestic hearth had become a further source of horror. When we got to the end of the main street, we saw little besides grey heaps of ruins, rapidly

igniting; the smoke from which was being carried into the dark storm-tossed forest beyond, making its long aisles dim with a low-lying, driving mist of smoke.

Erne rushed headlong into the thick of it, after Trevittick. His strength came back under his wild excitement, and his eagerness to forget himself. It was not so with either myself or my father. We worked, certainly, always keeping close together, but we worked without much heart, in spite of the horrors around us: what those horrors were it is no part of my duty to describe. When the tale was made up there were forty-six dead, of which number fifteen had been burnt to death while lying helpless under the ruins. Others who were saved, and lived, were terribly scorched and maimed. The total number of killed and wounded was but little under one hundred.

It was thirty-four hours before the centre of this dreadful cyclone reached us. Within an hour or two from the beginning of it, the forest had caught fire, and the fire had gone roaring off inland; so that the first night, in addition to our other terrors, we had the crowning one of a wall of seething fire to the leeward, barred by the tall black stems of the box-trees; a hell of fire, in which animal life could not exist. But by the time that the centre had reached us, the fire had

passed away, and left only a ruined, smouldering forest behind it. When the calm came, the deadly stillness was only broken by the crash of falling boughs from the still burning trees, or by the thundering fall of some great monarch of the forest, which, having withstood the wind, had at last succumbed to the gnawing flame.

When the calm came, I saw Erne for the first time, for he had been in the thick of it with Trevittick. He was wild, pale, and wan ; burnt dreadfully across his face, which was blackened with smoke ; his clothes torn and scorched, with one bruised arm slung up across his breast : nothing left of the handsome old Erne but the two blue black eyes, blazing brighter than ever. He came to me, just as my father had finished saying the prayer, " Lord, receive the soul of this Thy servant," over Tim Reilly, the horse-stealer, who had stolen his last steed and shut the stable door.

" So this is the end of it all," said Erne. " Have you been down to the bay ? Every ship is ashore or sunk. I agree with Trevittick : this is the beginning of the end. Human life is about to become impossible on the face of the globe. It will not be long now before the more visible portents will begin to show themselves."

Trevittick had done his work pretty quickly. He had contrived to put a larger quantity of his own non-

sense into Erne's head in four and thirty hours than I should have conceived possible. And Erne had never lost that childishness which had been so carefully fostered by his father ; so the soil, for that sort of thing, was in a good state. Erne, lowered by illness, famine, and hardship—maddened by the scene around him, and the full certainty that Emma must have perished—took to Trevittick's nonsense as a child takes to its mother's milk. Trevittick's theory that the end of the world had come had the effect of making all other things look small and insignificant, and I believe was partly the cause of his not going mad.

If poor Erne looked wild and terrible in the midst of the havoc, what shall I say of Trevittick himself, as he came up to us during the lull, asking for water ? A zealot driven from court to court of the burning temple, pausing for one more wild rush upon the Roman spears, must have looked very like him. His Jewish face, wearing that look of determined strength, and yet of wild, half-subdued passion ; which we Londoners know well, and dislike to face if we can help it ; was more strange and awful than his bare scorched bosom, or the blood which had soaked through his clothes, and even now trickled on the ground where he stood. He drank water eagerly, and then beckoned me to come aside with him.

I expected to hear some wild outbreak of fanaticism, some mad nonsense or another. But no. He had reserved all that sort of thing for Erne, it seemed, and now talked the commonest, shrewdest sense.

"It will be all over in twenty hours," he said; "we shall have the wind back from the other quarter directly. As soon as you can travel, get out the horses, and take Mr. Hillyar south till you meet the mail. If the *Wainoora* has sailed, she is wrecked. If so, she is wrecked somewhere on the coast. Keep him riding up and down the coast, looking for intelligence of her, so that, if the worst has happened, it may come over his mind by degrees, and while he is active, for I don't like the look of his eyes. Take Tom Williams with you, and go."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

## THE END OF THE CYCLONE.

BACK through the groaning forest came the return blast, crashing the half-burnt trees into ruins, and bearing the smoke of the burning tree-stems before it like a curtain of darkness. We spoke no more, for this new phase of the hurricane was more terrible to look on than any which had preceded it. I saw the forest light up again into a more lurid blaze than before, which apparently was bearing down straight upon us ; and I would have run back that I might perish with my wife and my child in my arms. But Trevittick's strong hand restrained me, and he laughed.

"Don't be a coward," he said ; "there is no danger now. Look at this, man, if you have courage ; you will never see the like in fifty lives. Look aloft."

I did so. The smoke was clearing fast, and I saw overhead, to the windward, a wall of ink-black cloud,

from which streamed, spreading below as they were caught by the wind, four or five dark purple cataracts of rain. Terrible enough this ; but why were they lit up with strange coruscating splendours of scarlet, of orange, and of violet ? That was caused by the incessant leaping lightning which followed the curtain of rain.

All night the wind rushed round the house like the sighs of a dying giant ; all night the thunder snarled, and the lightning leaped and hissed, till the house was as bright as day ; and I sat, with the child upon my knee and my wife sitting at my feet, listening to the fierce deluges of rain which were spouting from the house-eaves.

Sometime in the night Martha took the child. She had been very silent before, from fear, or what not ; but I noticed that the rocking of the child to and fro did for her what it seems to do for all mothers ; it loosened her tongue.

She spoke to me, turning her quiet eyes to mine.

"I am not afraid now, James."

"You have been so brave and so good."

"Have I ? I am glad of that. I was afraid I had not been doing my duty. Perhaps it was your mother kept me up."

Bless the little heroine ; there were a dozen maimed



creatures in the house, now tended by my father and mother, who could contradict her !

"James, dear, do you like Mr. Trevittick?"

"Yes; I admire and respect him above all men whom I know, next my father. He certainly does seem at times," I continued with a thoughtful and puzzled air, "to have boiled up his Bible, Old Testament and New, Jeremias and Revelations, into a sort of broth that's too strong for my poor-stomach. But he is a very noble person, old girl. Look at what we know of his life, and look at his work this last two days. Yes, I admire and love Trevittick."

"I don't," she said (to baby, of course).

"Why not?"

"He says such dreadful things. To-day he told father (*I* heard him) that the *Wainoora* had in all probability sailed before the storm came on, and that he had better prepare mother for what had most certainly happened. He said, 'Burton, you will never see your daughter again, and, though I envy her, I am deeply sorry for you.'"

"Trevittick's a fool," I said impatiently.

"I am glad you think that," said Martha. "Then you don't believe in the other dreadful thing he said?"

"What was that?"

"Why, that the day of judgment was come, and that

the last trump would sound as soon as the wind changed. I am particularly glad that you don't believe that."

I don't know what made me ask her, "Why?"

"Because I am so happy, dear. If I were to lose you or baby, I wouldn't mind so much, though there is a good deal to be thought about, and a good deal that would be very disagreeable under any circumstances. My dear, one night at Camden Town, when you had kept me out late, and I caught it; I perfectly well remember wishing Mrs. Jackson in heaven and out of the reach of temptation. Now that doesn't matter talking of between us two, but it is not the sort of thing you would like to say in public. No; I want to have you a few years longer. I am glad you don't believe what Trevittick said."

I was frowning, deep in thought. Could he be right? Had Arkwright been mad enough to put to sea? If he had been such a fool as to do so in the face of the sulky mercury, I should be answerable for my sister's death, because I told him of that miserable little earthquake which Trevittick and I had heard on the mountain. That is the way in which men think in hurricanes.

"But," I heard my wife rambling on, "God would never do such a thing as that, you know. You may

depend on it that Emma is safe enough. You needn't trouble your head about *her*. She will be well cared for wherever she goes."

And then the words of Trevittick came ringing in my ears again—"This world is not the place of punishment and reward : this world is not the place of punishment and reward." Was I to be driven mad by my own wife and a half-lunatic Cornishman ?

## CHAPTER XXX.

## JAMES BURTON'S STORY : NO ANSWER.

THE storm passed away towards the great interior, cracking the stunted forests, and lashing the lonely lakes into sheets of foam ; and so it died in the desert, for it never reached Timor. The brisk south-west wind came up, and Nature looked beautiful once more, as though trying, while the ruin of her Berserk fit was still lying around us, to make us forget that she ever could be cruel.

It was early on one of these crystal, clear mornings, which one would rashly say only existed in Australia ; did one not reflect that one is abroad by daylight there, and lies in bed till the day is warmed here—on a breezy, fresh morning, when the air seems to sparkle like champagne : that Erne and I got on our horses, and rode south to meet the mail.

I had—I cannot tell you why, or how—fully and entirely persuaded myself that Arkwright had never

been such a fool as to put to sea. What was better still, I had persuaded Erne so ; and we were both in good spirits. A natural reaction, after the horrors of the last three days, had set in, and we rode swiftly and cheerfully on, without a single misgiving as to the result of our journey.

The ruins of the storm were around us in every direction, and those ruins showed us, inexperienced as we were, that it had been the greatest storm for a hundred years.

In some places whole tracts of forest were levelled ; in others the trees had fallen until they had formed a screen for the wind, supported by unfallen trees to the leeward ; but everywhere there was nothing but ruin and desolation. I learnt the lesson, that in so new, and so little known a country, so near the terrible tropics, great allowances should be made for great natural disturbances. I thought of the story of Gundagai, on the Morumbidgee, where the black fellows, on being asked to show the highest floodmarks, pointed to the tops of the tallest trees. The government surveyor laughed at them, and laid out the town. The few survivors of that disaster lived to tell how the river rose sixty feet in a single night.

So we went southward. Half way to Pitt, the first important town, we met my youngest brother, Fred,

who, by some original line of thought, had arrived at the conclusion that the hurricane had given him an indefeasible right to run away from school, borrow a horse, and come northward, to see how we were getting on.

We took him back with us, and reached Pitt that night. Fred's report was right. The destruction at Pitt was scarcely less than that at Romilly ; but the wind had come on more gradually, with deluges of rain ; so there had been no fire. *Pitt* had been blown to ruins piecemeal, but the destruction of *Romilly* had been sudden, terrible, and unexpected. Erne pointed out this "conceit" to me next morning, as we rode southward. Harry, whom we had picked up after depositing Fred, riding with us, wondered why we laughed so boisterously at so poor a joke.

It was because a growing terror was on us of the news the mail would bring—a terror which neither of us would allow, even to himself, to exist, and which grew yet stronger as we went on. The boy Harry, who knew nothing of the state of the case, who was utterly unaware of our anxieties, went on prattling his beautiful nonsense, and kept us from thinking. But sometimes he would talk about Emma ; of some money he had saved to buy her a birthday present ; of a bowerbird's nest which he had kept for her ; of a hymn which he

had learnt to sing to her. Whenever he spoke of her I raised my hand, till at last the boy drew his horse back, and called to me.

I went back to him. "Why do you raise your hand when I speak of Emma?" he said. "Is she dead?"

"No, my boy. Erne is going to marry her; and he has been ill. I don't know why. Talk of anything else; don't talk of her just now."

The boy lingered after this; I had made him uneasy, and he talked no more.

We were going through some beautiful low wooded ranges: ranges which were only a succession of abrupt rocky hills and valleys in the forest, whose height and depth were so small that they were insignificant beneath the gigantic timber. The road, winding through and over them, never shewed us a prospect of more than a few hundred yards: and, going up one of the little valleys, more beautiful than most; for it had been sheltered from the storm, and the trees were untouched, and the tall spikes of heather were blossoming fair and free; here we came on the mail. It was only a scarlet dog-cart, driven tandem, but it seemed to me more terrible than a loaded cannon, about to unlimber and begin firing.

We knew the truth in two minutes. The *Wainoora* had sailed, just as Trevittick had said, on the 11:30 tide on Saturday. "Worse luck," said my friend, the

mail-man, but I interrupted him. I would have it all out. Now or never.

“Was my sister aboard, Tom?”

“Yes, Miss Burton were aboard,” said he, looking at me for one instant, and then looking at his horses. “Oh, yes, your sister were aboard, Mr. James. Likewise Mrs. Clayton along with her. Miss Burke, she weren’t on board, for I see her come back along the pier, and box a boy’s ears in front of Colton and Martin’s. No more were Mrs. Huxtable on board, for she is in bed with twins. And Sam Corry’s wife, she weren’t aboard, for I see her buying a umberreller in Bass Street arterwards. But Miss Burton, yes, she were aboard, because I see her standing between Captain Arkwright and Mrs. Clayton, as the boat went down the river, waving her hand, good-bye, to Miss Burke.”

The man drove on, and I turned to Harry. “Ride home and tell him what you have heard.” The boy turned pale, and went silently.

“We had better head for the coast, Erne.”

There was no answer, but we did so. In an hour or less, riding down a storm-ruined glen, we came suddenly upon the broad, cruel, beautiful sea—blue, sparkling, laughing, rejoicing under a swift south-easterly breeze, and a bright summer sun.



We turned our horses' heads southward, along the sands which fringed the ocean. I mean the *ocean*. How insignificant the shores of the narrow seas appear to one who has seen, and has not had time to forget, the broad, desolate seaboard which girds the ocean. Its breadth ; and the eternal thunder of the ground-swell of the rollers, which, in the calmest summer weather, make human life impossible on the margin of the great volume of water, point out the difference between it and the shores of smaller seas at once. A ride along the coast of Australia, with a sailless sea on the right, and a houseless land to the left, is something which, once seen, is never to be forgotten.

I was glad of the ceaseless thunder of the surf, for it prevented us talking ; but, when our way was barred by a cape, and we had to turn inland to pass it, we talked none the more. I do not know when I first began to despair ; but I know that I hardly spoke to or looked at Erne the whole of that weary day.

Some time in it ; some time in the afternoon ; I pushed my horse forward, for I saw a naked man lying asleep in the sun high up on the sand. Asleep, indeed—in the last sleep of all—with his face buried in the sand. When I raised his head, I remember, I saw the mark of his face taken off in the moist sand below, as perfectly as could have been done by an artist. But he was none of

the *Wainoora's* people ; for the wreck of a little coasting craft still lay about two hundred yards to sea, saved from utter destruction by the barrier of coral reef over which she had been partly blown. The poor young fellow had stripped and tried to swim ashore, but the rollers had drowned him. Of his shipmates we saw no sign. Their bodies had sunk with their clothes, and had not yet been cast up ; but, while we talked in a low voice together over him, there came from the low, shrub-grown sandhills shoreward, a mangy cur, a regular sailor's dog, who yelped round us in the madness of his joy. He had, I suspect, been watching his master, like a true-blue British cur, but had gone into the scrub foraging. Our arrival, he seemed to consider, had put matters on their old footing. It was all right now ; he bestrided his master's body and barked aloud with joy. When we rode away, he, conceiving that we were merely going for assistance, followed us to give us advice, but when we had gone a mile he stopped. We whistled and he came again, with his head on one side inquiringly. When we moved on he lost confidence in our intentions, and went scudding back as hard as he could to the corpse. I don't know what became of him, any more than I know what became of the Duc D'Enghien's spaniel, who lay in the ditch at Vincennes one memorable morning.

Where was the *Wainoora*? No answer from the thundering surf, from the screaming seabirds, from the whispering woodlands which fringed bay and cape; only an answer in my own heart, which grew louder and more inexorable as time went on.

We came to the lonely lighthouse, standing on the mainland, behind the Bird islands, which lay purple and quiet before us, twenty miles at sea. The lighthouse keepers shook their heads. Not only had they seen nothing of her, but the comrades of the lighthouse in the furthest of the islands seaward had no report to give. They would not say the word, but I saw it in their eyes.

At Palmerston we got intelligence. A ship had made the harbour, by good luck, in the midst of the gale. The captain reported that, nigh a hundred miles to the northward; where, he could not tell, only could guess; he had passed a small screw steamer, with only her foremast standing, steaming in the teeth of it, and seeming to hold her own. The sea was getting up then, he said, and the last he saw of her was, when she was clinging to the side of a great wave, like a bat on a wall.

This was all the account of her we got, and we never, never got any more. From the wild shore, from the wilder sea—from the coral reef and sandbank, from the

storm-tost sailor, or from the lonely shepherd on the forest lands above the cruel ocean, no answer but this. She had sailed out of port, and she never made port again. A missing ship, with the history of her last agony unwritten for ever!

## CHAPTER XXXI.

## THE END.

YES ; Emma was drowned ; whelmed in the depths of the pitiless sea—her last work over ; her final ministration of all pursued while the ship ceased to leap, and began to settle down. Cheering the soul of the wretched woman who was her companion, and for whom she was dying ; making, by her own high example, the passage from this world to the next less terrible to her trembling companion ; so she died.

At least, so we may gain from the tenor of her life : we shall never know anything certainly. Not so much as a hen-coop of the *Wainoora* was ever picked up at sea or on shore. Arkwright and his brave men shall lounge upon the quay no more for ever.

I leave Emma Burton to your judgment ; and you will, I think, deal leniently with her. We must say a

few words about the other people who have borne us company so far, before we take leave of them.

Erne Hillyar, reserving for himself only a younger brother's share of the fortune, made over the rest to Sir Reuben, in order that the baronetcy might be kept up in a befitting manner ; so that Sir Reuben found himself suddenly in a very elevated position, with the means of gratifying every taste.

He developed very soon into a most terrible dandy, placing steadily before him the object of being the best-dressed man in London. He never actually attained it, but he got very near the top of the tree. He was very kindly received in society, and very soon began to get on. As his father once said to him, "I have seen many a dandy made out of such stuff as you." He at first patronised the ring and the river extensively ; but, since his marriage with Miss Cockpole, daughter of Sir Pitchcroft Cockpole, he has given this up, and has taken to fox-hunting and pheasant-shooting. He is most universally and most deservedly popular.

He naturally leads one on to Samuel Burton. Samuel lives at Palmerston, and his wealth has very much increased. He does not look a bit older since we first knew him ; in fact, he is not what one would call an old man even yet, and has probably many years of life before

him. His life has been sufficiently decent, and his wealth sufficiently large, to enable him to enter in some sort into the ordinary society of the little township ; which may possibly do him good. Nobody but Sir George ever knew of the jewel robberies ; and the stolen money seems to have prospered as far as bringing excellent interest goes. That is all I know about Samuel Burton.

Those two most excellent middle-aged gentlemen, the Hon. Jack Dawson, and James Burton, are always together at one or the other's house. They go long journeys together on horseback ; and mighty pleasant it is, going through a forest at sunset, to see the two square grey heads, jogging on, side by side ; and pricking on to receive their kindly salute. They are prospering as they deserve.

The Honourable James Burton, the simple good-humoured ex-blacksmith, who has told so much of this story, was over in England, in 1862, as commissioner to the International Exhibition. The other Cooksland Commissioner was the Honourable Joseph Burton, his brother. Mrs. James Burton and Mrs. Joseph Burton were compared by some people as samples of Australian beauty. But, in fact, neither of them was Australian. Mrs. James Burton was a Wiltshire girl, who had once

been a servant ; and Mrs. Joseph was the widow of Lieutenant North, of the Engineers. Mrs. James was undoubtedly the most beautiful ; and many people were very much taken by the extreme repose of her manner ; but she could not for a moment compare with Mrs. Joseph in vivacity and powers of conversation. They were, both of them, however, in their different ways, thought very nice.

Mr. Compton is dead, and has left all his money (96,000*l.* by the way) to Baby, Sir George Hillyar's boy, who has been sent over to England by James Oxtan, and is now at Harrow. This leads us to speak of the Dowager Lady Hillyar.

Some folks say that she is not quite so cracked as she was ; but some, on the other hand, say that she is worse than ever. *Que-voulez-vous ?* One thing we know about her which seems worth mentioning.

When she heard of Sir George's death, she secluded herself, and they feared the worst consequences. But, after a short time, her grief grew tranquil ; and then they discovered that death had removed the cloud which sin had brought between George and Gerty, and that she loved him with the same passionate devotion as ever. She is much alone now, and her voice is less gay. Sometimes a solitary shepherd, far in the aisles of the



dark forest, will be startled by seeing a figure in black pass slowly across the farther end of some long-drawn glade, and disappear into the bosage once more; and then he will say to himself, "The mad Lady Hillyar." Or the native, crouched by the lake in the crater, waiting for the wildfowl; by the lonely shoreless lake unfolded in the steep treeless downs, will watch with eager curiosity the black figure—the only dark thing in the blazing landscape—which slowly crosses a segment of the sunny slope, tops the hill, and is gone. But, whenever her wandering feet bring her home—and where is her home but with James Oxtou?—whenever she comes into the room where he sits, his wife will notice that a shade will cross his face, as though he said to himself, "It was I did this."

Erne turned his back on a country which had become hateful to him, and, coming to England, managed to get a commission in the army (he was but just of age), and disappeared into the warcloud in the East.

He emerged from the smoke of Sebastopol, changed from a fanciful, sentimental child, into a thoughtful melancholy man; with the puzzle of life placed fairly before his eyes at last. The misery of the trenches; and the failure of our assault; a failure which he felt with childlike acuteness; had done this much for him. He

saw that life was not as one would have it: that one must submit to the failure of our boy-dreams, and not whine over them. One boy-dream he found had faded away, in the rude daylight of frost, hunger and failure; the dream of Emma Burton. She is but as a figure in a dream to him now. The man Erne thinks of the love which the child Erne had to her, as a boy's fancy, beautiful enough, but childish, romantic, and purged from him in those horrible trenches. Do you like Child Erne, or Man Erne the best? It is not for me to decide, but I think I will choose the child.

The old house at Chelsea is pulled down, this long while past. It stood, when I was a boy, where the south side of Paulton Square stands, I think; but the place is so much changed that I am not certain to a few yards. *Truly its place knows it no more.*

There is one more figure I should like to see before I close; and part from the reader. Ah! here. Who is this tall woman, standing so steady and so firm on the very summit of this breezy cape? She has dismounted from her horse, and is quite alone; the bridle is over her left arm, and with that hand she has gathered up the loose folds of her riding habit, which fits her magnificent figure so well; but with her right hand, with the hand which holds her whip, she is shading her eyes, for she

is gazing steadily seaward. Why loiter here, Lesbia Burke, idly dreaming ? That happened years ago ; and can the sea give up its dead ? Sooner shall one of those purple islands at which you are gazing, break from its moorings and ground in the surges which are thundering three hundred feet below ; than shall the dead come back. But good-bye, Lesbia Burke ; a hundred times good-bye !

THE END.

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